





SETH'S BROTHER'S WIFE

*A STUDY OF LIFE IN THE GREATER
NEW YORK.*

BY

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TO
MY MOTHER

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SETH'S BROTHER'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIRED FOLK.

“EF ther' ain't a flare-up in *this* haouse 'fore long, I miss *my* guess,” said Alvira, as she kneaded the pie-crust, and pulled it out between her floury fingers to measure its consistency. “Ole Sabriny's got her back up this time to stay.”

“Well, let 'em flare, says I. 'Taint none o' aour business, Alviry.”

“I knaow, Milton; but still it seems to me she might wait at least till th' corpse was aout o' th' haouse.”

“What's thet got to dew with it?”

The callousness of the question must have grated upon the hired-girl, for she made no reply, and slapped the dough over on the board with an impatient gesture.

It was near the close of a fair day, late in May, and the reddened sunlight from the West would have helped to glorify any human being less hopelessly commonplace than Milton Squires as he sat

in its full radiance on the doorstep, peeling and quartering apples over a pan which he held between his knees. This sunlight, to reach him, painted with warm tints many objects near at hand which it could not make picturesque. The three great barns, standing in the shadow to the south, were rickety and ancient without being comely, and the glare only made their awkward outlines and patched, paintless surfaces the meaner; the score of lean cows, standing idly fetlock-deep in the black mire of the barnyard, or nipping the scant tufts of rank grass near the trough, seemed all the dingier and scrawnier for the brilliancy of the light which covered them; the broken gate, the bars eked out with a hop-pole, the wheelbarrow turned shiftlessly against a break in the wall, the mildewed wellcurb, with its antiquated reach—all seemed in this glow of dying day to be conscious of exhibiting at its worse their squalid side. The sunset could not well have illumined, during that hour at least, a less inspiring scene than this which Alvira, looking out as she talked, or the hired man, raising his head from over the apples, could see from the kitchen door of Lemuel Fairchild's farm-house. But any student of his species would have agreed that, in all the uninviting view, Milton was the least attractive object.

As he rose to empty his pan within, and start afresh, he could be seen more fully. He was clumsily cased from neck to ankles in brown overalls, threadbare, discolored, patched, with mud about the knees and ragged edges lower down. He wore rub-

ber boots, over the bulging legs of which the trousers came reluctantly, and the huge feet of these were slit down the instep. His hat had been soft and black once; now it seemed stiffened with dirt, to which the afternoon milking had lent a new contribution of short reddish hair, and was shapeless and colorless from age. His back was narrow and bent, and his long arms terminated in hands which it seemed sinful to have touch anything thereafter to be eaten. Viewed from behind, Milton appeared to be at least fifty. But his face showed a somewhat younger man, despite its sun-baked lines and the frowzy beard which might be either the yellow of unkempt youth or the gray of untidy age. In reality he was not yet thirty-six.

He slouched out now with a fresh lot of apples, and, squatting on the door-stone, resumed the conversation.

“I s’pose naow Sissly’s gone, ther’ won’t be no livin’ under th’ same roof with Sabriny fer any of us. Ther’ ain’t nobuddy lef’ fer her to rassel with ‘cep’ us. Ole Lemuel’s so broken-up, he won’t dare say his soul’s his own; ’n John—well, Lize Wilkins says she heerd him say he didn’t know’s he’d come to th’ funer’l ’t all, after th’ way him ’n’ Sabriny hed it aout las’ time he was here.”

“I wasn’t talkin’ o’ *them!*” said Alvira, slapping the flour from her hands and beginning with the roller; “it’d be nothin’ new, her tryin’ to boss *them*. But she’s got her dander up naow agin somebuddy that beats them all holler. They won’t no Rich-

ardsons come puttin' on airs 'raoun' here, an' takin' th' parlor bedroom 'thaout askin', not ef th' ole lady knaows herself—'n' I guess she does."

"What Richardsons?" asked Milton. "Thought Sissly was th' last of 'em—thet they wa'n't no more Richardsons."

"Why, man alive, ain't Albert's wife a Richardson, th' daughter of Sissly's cousin—you remember, that pock-pitted man who kep' th' fast hoss here one summer. Of course she's a Richardson—full-blooded! When she come up from th' train here this mornin', with Albert, I see by th' ole lady's eye 't she meant misch'f. I didn't want to see no raow, here with a corpse in th' haouse, 'n' so I tried to smooth matters over, 'n' kind o' quiet Sabriny daown, tellin' her thet they had to come to th' funer'l, 'n' they'd go 'way soon's it was through with, 'n' that Albert, bein' the oldest son, hed a right to th' comp'ny bed-room."

"'N' what'd she say?"

"She didn't say much, 'cep' thet th' Richardsons hed never brung nothin' but bad luck to this haouse, 'n' they never would, nuther. 'N' then she flaounced upstairs to her room, jis 's she allus does when she's riled, 'n' she give Albert's wife sech a look, I said to m'self, 'Milady, I wouldn't be in *your* shoes fer all yer fine fixin's.'"

"Well, she's a dum likely lookin' woman, ef she *is* a Richardson," said Milton, with something like enthusiasm. "Wonder ef she wears one o' them low-necked gaowns when she's to hum, like th'

picters in th' *Ledger*. They say they all dew, in New York."

"Haow sh'd I knaow!" Alvira sharply responded. "I got enough things to think of, 'thaout both'rin' my head abaout city women's dresses. 'N' you ought to hev, tew. Ef you'n' Leander'd pay more heed to yer work, 'n' dew yer chores up ship-shape, 'n' spen' less time porin' over them good-fer-nothin' story-papers, th' farm wouldn't look so run-daown 'n' slaouchy. Did yeh hear what Albert said this mornin', when he looked 'raoun'? 'I swan!' he said, 'I b'lieve this is th' seediest lookin' place 'n all Northern New York.' Nice thing fer him to hev to say, wa'n't it!"

"What d' I keer what *he* says? He ain't th' boss here, by a jug-full!"

"'N' more's th' pity, tew. He'd make yeh toe th' mark!"

"Yes, 'n' Sabriny 'd make it lively fer his wife, tew. Th' ole fight 'baout th' Fairchileses 'n' th' Richardsons wouldn't be a succumstance to thet. Sissly 'd thank her stars that she was dead 'n' buried aout o' th' way."

These two hired people, who discussed their employer and his family with that easy familiarity of Christian names to be found only in Russia and rural America, knew very well what portended to the house when the Richardson subject came up. Alvira Roberts had spent more than twenty years of her life in the thick of the gaseous strife between Fairchild and Richardson. She was a mere slip of

a girl, barely thirteen, when she had first hired out at the homestead, and now, black-browed, sallow from much tea-drinking, and with a sharp, deep wrinkle vertically dividing her high forehead, she looked every year of her thirty-five. Compared with her, Milton Squires was a new comer on the farm, but still there were lean old cows over yonder in the barnyard, lazily waiting for the night-march to the pastures, that had been ravenous calves in their gruel-bucket stage when he came.

What these two did not know about the Fairchild family was hardly worth the knowing. Something of what they knew, the reader ought here to be told.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF LEMUEL.

LEMUEL FAIRCHILD, the bowed, gray-haired, lumpish man who at this time sat in the main living room within, feebly rocking himself by the huge wood-stove, and trying vaguely as he had been for thirty-six hours past, to realize that his wife lay in her final sleep in the adjoining chamber, had forty-odd years before been as likely a young farmer as Dearborn County knew. He was fine-looking and popular in those days, and old Seth Fairchild, dying unexpectedly, had left to this elder son his whole possessions—six hundred acres of dairy and hop land, free and clear, a residence much above the average farm-house of these parts, and a tidy sum of money in the bank.

The contrast now was sweeping. The Fairchild's house was still the largest residential structure on the Burfield road, which led from Thessaly across the hills to remote and barbarous latitudes, but respect had long since ceased to accrue to it upon the score of its size. To the local eye, it was the badge and synonym of "rack and ruin;" while sometimes strangers of artistic tastes, chancing to travel by this unfrequented road, would voice regrets that such a

prospect as opened to the vision just here, with the noble range of hills behind for the first time looming in their true proportions, should be spoiled by such a gaunt, unsightly edifice, with its tumble-down surroundings, its staring windows cheaply curtained with green paper, and its cheerless, shabby color—that indescribable gray with which rain and frost and Father Time supplant unrenewed white. The garden, comprising a quarter-acre to the east of the house, was a tangled confusion of flowers and weeds and berry-bushes run wild, yet the effect somehow was mean rather than picturesque. The very grass in the yard to the west did not grow healthfully, but revealed patches of sandy barrenness, created by feet too indifferent or unruly to keep the path to the barns.

Yet the neighbors said, and Lemuel had come himself to feel, that the blame of this sad falling off was not fairly his. There had been a fatal defect in the legacy.

The one needful thing which the Hon. Seth Fairchild did *not* leave his elder son was the brains by means of which he himself, in one way or another, had gathered together a substantial competency, won two elections to the State Senate, and established and held for himself the position of leading citizen in his town—that most valued and intangible of American local distinctions. But while Lemuel's brown hair curled so prettily, and his eyes shone with the modest light of wealthy and well-behaved youth, nobody missed the brains. If there was any

change in the management of the farm, it passed unnoticed, for all attention was centred on the great problem, interesting enough always when means seeks a help-meet, but indescribably absorbing in rural communities, where everybody knows everybody and casual gallants never come for those luckless damsels neglected by native swains—Whom will he marry?

It boots not now to recall the heart-burnings, the sad convictions that life would henceforth be a blank, the angry repinings at fate, which desolated the village of Thessaly and vicinity when Lemuel, returning from a mid-winter visit to Albany, brought a bride in the person of a bright eyed, handsome and clever young lady who had been Miss Cicely Richardson. He had known her, so they learned, for some years—not only during his school-days at the Academy there, but later, in what was mysteriously known in Thessaly as “society,” in whose giddy mazes he had mingled while on a visit to his legislative sire at the Capital City. No, it is not worth while to dwell upon the village hopes rudely destroyed by this shock—for they are dim memories of the far, far past.

But to one the blow was a disappointment not to be forgotten, or to grow dim in recollection. Miss Sabrina Fairchild was two years younger than her brother in age—a score of years his senior in firmness and will. She had only a small jointure in her father's estate, because she had great expectations from an aunt in Ohio, in perpetual memory of whose anticipated bounty she bore her scriptural name, but she

was a charge on her brother in that she was to have a home with him until she chose to leave it for one of her own. I doubt not that her sagacious father foresaw, from his knowledge of his daughter, the improbability that this second home would ever be offered her.

Miss Sabrina, even at this tender age, was clearly not of the marrying kind, and she grew less so with great steadiness. She was at this early date, when she was twenty-four, a woman of markedly strong character, of which perhaps the most distinct trait was family pride.

There has been a considerable army of State Senators since New York first took on the honors of a Commonwealth, and unto them a great troop of daughters have been born, but surely no other of all these girls ever exulted so fondly, nay, fiercely, in the paternal dignity as did Sabrina. She knew nothing of politics, and little of the outside world; her conceptions of social possibilities were of the most primitive sort; one winter, when she went to Albany with her father, and was passed in a bewildered way through sundry experiences said to be of a highly fashionable nature, it had been temporarily apparent to her own consciousness that she was an awkward, ignorant, red-armed country-girl—but this only for one wretched hour or so. Every mile-post passed on her homeward ride, as she looked through the stage window, brought restored self-confidence, and long before the tedious journey ended she was more the Senator's daughter than ever.

Through this very rebound from mortification she queened it over the simpler souls of the village with renewed severity and pomp. The itinerant singing master who thought to get her for the asking into his class in the school-house Wednesday evenings, was frozen by the amazed disdain of her refusal. When young Smith Thurber, the kiln-keeper's son, in the flippant spirit of fine buttons and a resplendent fob, asked her to dance a measure with him at the Wallaces' party, the iciness of her stare fairly took away his breath.

Something can be guessed of her emotions when the brother brought home his bride. With a half-cowardly, half-kindly idea of postponing the trouble certain to ensue, he had given Sabrina no warning of his intention, and, through the slow mails of that date, only a day's advance notice of his return with Mrs. Lemuel. The storm did not burst at once. Indeed it may be said never to have really burst. Sabrina was not a bad woman, according to her lights, and she did nothing consciously to make her sister-in-law unhappy. The young wife had a light heart, a sensible mind and the faculty of being cheerful about many things which might be expected to annoy. But she had some pride, too, and although at the outset it was the very simple and praiseworthy pride of a well-meaning individual, incessant vaunting of the Fairchilds quite naturally gave a family twist to it, and she soon was able to resent slights in the name of all the Richardsons.

After all, was she not in the right? for while the

grass was scarcely green on the grave of the first Fairchild who had amounted to anything, there were six generations of Richardsons in Albany chronicles alone who had married into the best Dutch families of that ancient, aristocratic town, to say nothing of the New England record antedating that period. Thus the case appeared to her, and came gradually to have more prominence in her mind than, in her maiden days, she could have thought possible.

So this great Forty Years' War began, in which there was to be no single grand, decisive engagement, but a thousand petty skirmishes and little raids, infinitely more vexatious and exhausting, and was waged until the weaker of the combatants, literally worn out in the fray, had laid down her arms and her life together, and was at peace at last, under the sheet in the darkened parlor.

The other veteran party to the feud, her thin, iron-gray hair half concealed under a black knit cap, her bold, sharp face red as with stains of tears, sat at the window of her own upper room, reading her Bible. If Milton and Alvira had known that she was reading in Judges, they might have been even more confident of a coming "flare-up."

CHAPTER III.

AUNT SABRINA.

NEIGHBORING philosophers who cared, from curiosity or a loftier motive, to study the Fairchild domestic problem, in all its social and historic ramifications, generally emerged from the inquiry with some personal bias against Miss Sabrina, tempered by the conclusion that, after all, there was a good deal to be said on the old lady's side.

Certainly, as the grim old maid in the rusty bombazine gown and cap, which gave a funereal air even to the red plaid shawl over her shoulders, sat at her upper window, and tried through a pained and resentful chaos of secular thoughts to follow the Scriptural lines, there was an extremely vivid conviction uppermost in her mind that justice had been meted out neither to her nor to the Fairchilds. She would have repelled indignantly, and honestly enough too, the charge that there was any bitterness in her heart toward the sister-in-law whose burial was appointed for the morrow. She had liked poor Cicely, in her iron-clad way, and had wept genuine tears more than once since her death. Indeed, her thoughts—and they were persistent, self-asserting thoughts which not even her favorite recital of Gideon's sanguinary

triumph could keep back—ran more upon the living than upon the dead.

And what gloomy, melancholy thoughts they were! They swept over two score of years, the whole gamut of emotion, from the pride and hope of youth to the anguish of disappointed, wrathful, hopeless old age, as her hand might cover all there was of sound in music by a run down her mother's ancient spinet which stood, mute and forgotten, in the corner of the room. Her brother, this brother whom satirical fate had made a Lemuel instead of a Lucy or a Lucretia, a man instead of a woman as befitted his weakness of mind and spirit—had begun life with a noble heritage. Where was it now? He had been the heir to a leading position among the men of his county. What was he now? The Fairchilds had been as rich, as respected, as influential as any Dearborn family. Who did them honor now?

The mental answers to these questions blurred Miss Sabrina's spectacles with tears, and Gideon's performance with the lamps seemed a tiresome thing. She laid the Book aside, and went softly down stairs to her brother, who sat, still rocking in his late wife's high, cushioned arm-chair, disconsolate by the stove.

There were also in the room his oldest son and this son's wife, sitting dumbly, each at a window, making a seemly pretence of not being bored by the meagre prospect without. They looked at their aunt in that far-off impassive manner with which participants in a high pageant or solemn observance

always regard one another. There was no call for a greeting, since they had already exchanged whispered salutations, earlier in the day. Miss Sabrina glanced at the young wife for an instant—it was not a kindly glance. Then her eyes turned to the husband, and while surveying him seemed suddenly to light up with some new thought. She almost smiled, and her tight pressed lips parted. Had they followed the prompting of the brain and spoken, the words would have been :

“Thank God, there is still Albert !”

Albert Fairchild would have been known in any company, and in any guise, I think, for a lawyer. The profession had its badge in every line and aspect of his face, in every movement of his head, and, so it seemed, in the way he held his hands, in the very tone of his voice. His face was round, and would have been pleasant, so far as conformation and expression went, had it not been for the eyes, which were unsympathetic, almost cold. Often the rest of his countenance was wreathed in amiable smiles ; but the eyes smiled never. He had looked a middle-aged man for a decade back, and casual acquaintances who met him from year to year complimented him on not growing old, because they saw no change. In fact he had been old from the beginning, and even now looked more than his age, which lacked some few months of forty. He was growing bald above the temples, and, like all the Fairchilds, was taking on flesh with increasing years.

Nothing could have better shown the extremity

of poor Sabrina's woe than this clutching at the relief afforded by the sight of Albert, for she was not on good terms with him. Albert had been born and reared through boyhood at a time when the farm was still prosperous and money plenty. He had been educated far beyond the traditions of his sires, and was the first University man of his family, so far as was known. He had been given his own bent in all things, before he settled down to a choice of profession, and then, at considerable expense, had been secured a place with one of the greatest legal firms in New York City. For years the first fruits of the soil, the cream off all the milk—so the Aunt's mingled scriptural and dairy metaphors ran—had been his. And what return had they had for it? He had become a sound, successful lawyer, with a handsome income, and he had married wealth as well. Yet year after year, as the fortunes of the Fairchild homestead declined, he had never interfered to prevent the fresh mortgage being placed—nay, had more than once explicitly declined to help save it.

"Agriculture is out of date in this State," she had heard him ^{Albert} say once, with her own ears, "Better let the old people live on their capital, as they go along. It's no use throwing good money after bad. Farm land here in the East is bound to decrease in value, steadily."

This about the homestead—about the cradle of his ancestors! Poor old lady, had the Fairchilds been sending baronial roots down through all this soil for a thousand years, she couldn't have been

more pained or mortified over Albert's callous view of the farm which her grandfather, a revolted cobbler from Rhode Island, had cleared and paid for at ten cents an acre.

Then there was his marriage, too. In all the years of armed neutrality or tacit warfare which she and Cicely had passed together under one roof, they had never before or since come so near an open and palpable rupture as they did over a city-bred cousin of Cicely's—a forward, impertinent, ill-behaved girl from New York, who had come to the farm on a visit some ten years before, and whose father was summoned at last to take her away because otherwise she, Sabrina, threatened to herself leave the house. There had been a desperate scene before this conclusion was reached. Sabrina had stormed and threatened to shake the dust of the homestead from off her outraged sandals. Cicely for the once had stood her ground, and said she fancied even worse things than that might happen without producing a universal cataclysm. Lemuel had almost wept with despair over the tumult. The two older boys, particularly John, had not concealed their exuberant hope that their maiden Aunt might be taken at her word, and allowed to leave. And the girl herself, this impudent huzzy of a Richardson, actually put her spoke in too, and said things about old cats and false teeth, which it made Sabrina's blood still boil to recall.

And it was this girl, of all others in the world, whom Albert must go and marry!

Yet Sabrina, in her present despondent mood, felt herself able to rise above mere personal piques and dislikes, if there really was a hope for the family's revival. She was not very sanguine about even Albert, but beyond him there was no chance at all.

John, the second brother, had talent enough, she supposed. People said he was smart, and he must be, else he could scarcely have come in his twenty-eighth year to be owner and editor of the *Thessaly Banner of Liberty*, and put in all those political pieces, written in the first person plural, as if he had the power of attorney for all Dearborn county. But then he was mortally shiftless about money matters, and they did say that since his wife's death—a mere school-teacher she had been—he had become quite dissipated and played billiards. Besides she was at open feud with him, and never, never would speak to him again, the longest day *he* lived! So that settled John.

As for Seth, the youngest of the brothers, it is to be doubted if she would have thought of him at all, had he not come in at the moment. He had been down to the village to get some black clothes which the tailor had constructed on short notice for him, and he, too, passed through the sitting room to the stairs with the serious look and the dead silence which the awful presence imposes.

Then she did think of him for a moment, as she stood warming her fingers over the bald, flat top of the stove—for though bright and warm enough out-

side, the air was still chilly in these great barns of rooms.

Seth was indisputably the handsomest of all the Fairchilds, even handsomer than she remembered his father to have been—a tall, straight, broad-shouldered youth, who held his head well up and looked everybody in the face with honest hazel eyes. He had the Richardson complexion, a dusky tint gained doubtless from all those Dutch intermarriages of which poor Cicely used to make so much, but his brown hair curled much as Lemuel's used to curl, only not so effeminately, and his temper was as even as his father's had been, though not so submissive or weak. His hands were rough and coarse from the farm work, and his walk showed familiarity with ploughed ground, but still he had, in his way, a more distinguished air than either Albert or John had ever had.

Looking him over, a stranger would have been surprised that his aunt should have left him out of her thoughts of the family's future—or that, once pausing to consider him, she should have dropped the idea so swiftly. But so it was. Miss Sabrina felt cold and aggrieved toward Albert, and she came as near hating John as a deeply devout woman safely could. She simply took no account of Seth at all, as she would have expressed it. To her he was a quiet, harmless sort of youngster, who worked prettily steadily on the farm, and got on civilly with people. She understood that he was very fond of reading, but that made no special impression on her.

If she had been asked, she would undoubtedly have said that Seth was her favorite nephew—but she had never dreamed of regarding him as a possible restorer of the family glories.

“Is yer oven hot enough?” she asked Alvira in the kitchen, a minute later. “If they’s anything I *dew* hate, it’s a soggy undercrust.”

“I guess I kin manage a batch o’ pies by this time,” returned the hired-girl with a sniff. Through some unexplained process of reasoning, Alvira was with the Fairchilds as against the Richardsons, but she was first of all for herself, against the whole human race.

“Milton gone aout with the caows?” asked the old lady, ignoring for the once the domestic’s challenge. “When he comes back, he ’n’ Leander better go over to Wilkinses, and get what chairs they kin spare. I s’pose there’ll be a big craowd, ef only to git in and see if there’s any holes in our body-Brussels yit, ’n’ haow that sofy-backed set in the parlor’s holdin’ out. Poor Cicely! I think they better bring over the chairs tonight, after dusk. What people don’t see they can’t talk abaout.”

“Heard Milton say he was goin’ to borry some over at Warren’s,” remarked Alvira, in a casual way, but looking around to see how the idea affected Miss Sabrina.

“Well he jis’ won’t!” came the answer, very promptly and spiritedly. “If every mortal soul of ’em hes to stan’ up, he won’t! I guess Lemuel Fairchild’s wife can be buried ’thaout asking any

help from Matildy Warren. I wouldn't ask her if 'twas th' las' thing I ever did."

"But Annie sent word she was comin' over fus' thing in th' mornin', so's to help clear up th' breakfast things. If she's good enough fer that, I don't see why you need be afeered o' borryin' her chairs."

"They ain't her chairs, and you knaow it, Alviry. I ain't got a word to say agin' Annie Fairchild, but when it comes to her gran' mother, I kin ride a high horse as well's she kin. After all the trouble she made my family, the sight of a single stick of her furnitur' here 'd be enough to bring the rafters of this haouse daown over my head, I do believe!"

"Well, of course, 'tain't none o' my business, but seems to me there'll be a plaguey slim fun'r'l when *your* turn comes if you're goin' to keep up all these old-woman's fights with everybody 'raound abaout."

"Naow Alviry!" began Miss Sabrina, in her shrillest and angriest tone; then with a visible effort, as if remembering something, she paused and then went on in a subdued, almost submissive voice, "You knaow jis' haow Matildy Warren's used us. From the very day my poor brother William ran off with her Jenny—and goodness knaows whatever possessed him to dew it—thet old woman's never missed a chance to run us all daown—ez ef she oughtn't to been praoud o' th' day a Fairchild took up with a Warren."

"Guess you ain't had none the wu'st of it," put in Alvira, with sarcasm. "Guess your tongue's

'baout as sharp as her'n ever was. B'sides she's bed-ridden naow, 'n' everybody thought she wouldn't get threw th' spring. 'N' ef Seth's goin' to make up to Annie, you ought to begin to smooth things over 'fore she dies. There's no tellin' but what she mightn't leave the farm away f'm th' girl at th' last minute, jis' to spite you."

"Yeh needn't talk as if *I* wanted her pesky farm!"

"Oh, well now, you knaow what I mean 's well 's I dew. What's th' use o' harpin' on what yer brother William did, or what ole Matildy said, 'fore I was born, when you knaow th' tew farms jine, and yer heart's sot on havin' 'em in one—Yes, 'fore I was born," repeated the domestic, as if pleased with the implication of juvenility.

Miss Sabrina hesitated, and looked at Alvira meditatively through her spectacles, in momentary doubt about the propriety of saying a sharp thing under all the circumstances; but the temptation was not to be resisted. "'N' you ain't percisely a chicken yourself, Alviry," she said and left the kitchen.

Later, when Milton had returned from the pasture, and hung about the kitchen, mending the harness that went with the democrat-wagon while waiting for Leander to return from the cheese factory, Alvira remarked:

"Seems 'if Sabriny 'd lost all her sper't this last day or tew. Never see sech a change. She don't answer up wuth a cent. I shouldn't be s'prised if she didn't tackle Albert's wife after all. Oh yes, 'n'

you ain't to go to Warren's for them chairs. Sabriny's dead-set agin that."

"What's up?" asked Milton, "Hez Seth broke off with Annie?"

"Don't knaow's they ever was anything particular to break off. No, 't 'aint that; it's the same raow 'tween the two ole women. Goodness knaows, I'm sick 'n' tired of hearin' 'baout it."

"No, but ain't Seth 'n' Annie fixed it up?" persisted Milton; "Daown't th' corners they say it's all settled." Then he mutteringly added, as he slouched out to meet Leander, who drove up now with a great rattle of empty milk-cans. "I wish't I was in Seth's shoes."

"Oh, you *dew*, dew yeh!" said Alvira, thus left to herself.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO YOUNG WOMEN.

THE young girl whose future had been settled down at the corners, came along the road next morning toward the Fairchild house, all unconscious of her destiny. She lived in a small, old-fashioned farm-dwelling back in the fields, alone with her grandmother, and although there was a bitter feud between the heads of the two houses, it had not stopped her from being a familiar and helpful figure in her uncle's homestead.

Annie Fairchild was a country girl in some senses of the term, calm-faced, clear-eyed, self-reliant among her friends, but with a curious disposition toward timidity in the presence of strangers. She was held to be too serious and "school-ma'am-ish" for pleasant company by most rural maidens of her acquaintance, and the few attempts of young farmers of the country-side to establish friendly relations with her had not been crowned with conspicuous success. It could scarcely be said that she was haughty or cold; no one could demonstrate in detail that her term of schooling in a far-off citified seminary had made her proud or uncivil; but still she had no intimates.

This was the more marked from the fact that she was a pretty girl—or if not precisely pretty, very attractive and winning in face. No other girl of the neighborhood had so fine and regular a profile, or such expressive, dark eyes, or so serenely intelligent an expression. It had been whispered at one time that Reuben Tracy, the school-master, was likely to make a match of it with her, but this had faded away again as a rootless rumor; by this time everybody on the Burfield road tacitly understood that eventually she was to be the wife of her cousin Seth, when it “came time for the two farms to join.” And she had grown accustomed long since to the furtive, half-awed, half-covetous look which men cast upon her, without suspecting the spirit of reluctant renunciation underlying it.

She met Milton Squires on the road, close in front of the Fairchild’s house, this morning, and, nodding to him, passed on. She did not particularly note the gaze he bent upon her as she went by, and which followed her afterward, almost to the Fairchild gate. If she had done so, and could have read all its meaning, she would not have gone on with so unruffled a face, for it was a look to frighten an honest young woman—an intent, hungry, almost wolfish look, unrelieved by so much as a glimmer of the light of manliness.

But she was alike unconscious of his thoughts and of the gossip he had heard at the corners. Certainly no listener who followed her to the gate, where she encountered Seth at work screwing on a new hinge,

would have gathered from the tone or words of the greeting on either side any testimony to confirm the common supposition that they were destined for each other.

“Good morning, Seth,” she said, halting while he dragged the great gate open for her, “you’re all through breakfast, I suppose?”

“No, I think Albert and his wife are at the table still. We didn’t call them when the rest got up, you know. They’re not used to country ways.”

“Anybody else here?”

“No, except John.”

“Oh, I’m so glad he came. That Lize Wilkins has been telling everybody he wouldn’t come on Sabrina’s account. And it would have looked *so* bad.”

“Yes, Lize Wilkins talks too much. All John ever said was that he wouldn’t stay here in the house any more than he could help. It’s too bad he can’t get along better with Aunt; it would make things so much pleasanter.”

“How’s your father, Seth? He seemed at first to take it pretty hard.”

“He appeared a little brighter yesterday, after Albert came, but he’s very poorly this morning. Poor old man, it makes a sad difference with him—more I suppose than with us boys, even with me, who never have been away from her hardly for a day.”

“Yes, Seth, a boy outgrows his mother, I suppose, but for an old couple who have lived together

forty years a separation like this must be awful. I shall go up to the house now."

Seth followed her with his eyes as she walked up the road, past the old-fashioned latticed front door with its heavy fold of crape hanging on the knocker, and turned from sight at the corner of the house; and the look in his face was soft and admiring, even if it was hardly loverlike. In his trouble—and he felt the bereavement most keenly—it seemed restful and good to have such a girl as Annie about. Indeed, a vague thought that she had never before seemed so sweet and likeable came to him, as he turned again to the hinge, and lightened his heart perceptibly, for almost the last words his mother had spoken to him had been of his future with Annie as his wife.

"You will have the farm before long, Seth," she said, smiling faintly as he stroked her pale hair—somehow to the last it never grew grey—and looked at her through boyish tears, "and Annie will bring you the Warren farm. Her grandmother and I have talked it over many a time. Annie's a good girl, there's no better, and she'll make my boy a good, true wife."

For a year or two back Seth had understood in a nebulous way that his parents had an idea of his eventually marrying Annie, but his mother's words still came to him in the form of a surprise. First, it had been far from his thoughts that old Mrs. Warren, Annie's invalid grandmother, would listen to such a thing, much less plan it. There was a bit-

terness of long standing between the two families, he knew. His father's younger brother—a half-brother—named William Fairchild, had married Mrs. Warren's only daughter under circumstances which he had never heard detailed, but which at least had enraged the mother. Both William and his wife had died, out West he believed, years and years ago, leaving only this girl, Annie Fairchild, who came an orphan to the grandmother she had never seen before, and was reared by her. In this Mrs. Warren and his aunt Sabrina had found sufficient occasion for a quarrel, lasting ever since he could remember, and as he had always understood from his aunt that her battle was in defense of the whole family, he had taken it for granted that he not less than the other Fairchilds was included in Mrs. Warren's disfavor. He recalled, now, indeed, having heard Annie say once or twice that her grandmother liked him; but this he had taken in a negative way, as if the grandmother of the Capulets had remarked that of all the loathed Montagus perhaps young Romeo was personally the least offensive to her sight.

And second, he was far from being in a Romeo's condition of heart and mind. He was not in love with Annie for herself—much less for the Warren farm. To state plainly what Seth had not yet mustered courage to say in entire frankness even to himself, he hated farming, and rebelled against the idea of following in his father's footsteps. And the dreams of a career elsewhere which occupied the mutinous thoughts Seth concealed under so passive

an exterior had carried him far away from the plan of an alliance with the nice sort of country cousin who would eventually own the adjoining farm. So in this sense, too, his mother's dying words were a surprise—converting into a definite and almost sacred desire what he had supposed to be merely a shapeless fancy.

Not all this crossed his mind, as he watched Annie till she disappeared, and then turned back to his work. But the sight of her had been pleasant to him, and her voice had sounded very gentle and yet full of the substance of womanliness—and perhaps his poor, dear mother's plan for him, after all, was the best.

The gate swinging properly at last, there was an end to Seth's out-door tasks, and he started toward the house. The thought that he would see Annie within was distinct enough in his mind, almost, to constitute a motive for his going. At the very door he encountered his brother Albert's wife, coming out, and stopped.

Isabel Fairchild was far from deserving, at least as a woman, the epithets with which Aunt Sabrina mentally coupled her girlhood. There was nothing impertinent or ill-behaved about her appearance, certainly, as she stood before Seth, and with a faint smile bade him good-morning.

She was above the medium height, as woman's stature goes, and almost plump; her hair, much of which was shown in front by the pretty Parisian form of straw hat she wore, was very light in color;

her eyes were blue, a light, noticeable blue. She wore some loose kind of black and gray morning dress, with an extra fold falling in graceful lines from her shoulders to her train, like a toga, and she carried a dainty parasol, also of black and gray, like the ribbons on her dark hat. To Seth's eyes she had seemed yesterday, when he saw her for the first time, a very embodiment of the luxury, beauty, refinement of city life—and how much more so now, when her dingy traveling raiment had given place to this most engaging garb, so subdued, yet so lovely. It seemed to him that his sister-in-law was quite the most attractive woman he had ever seen.

“I thought of going for a little stroll,” she said, again with the faint, half-smile. “It is so charming outside, and so blue and depressing in the house. Can I walk along there through the orchard now?—I used to when I was here as a girl, I know—and won't you come with me? I've scarcely had a chance for a word with you since we came.”

The invitation was pleasant enough to Seth, but he looked down deprecatingly at his rough chore clothes, and wondered whether he ought to accept it or not.

“Why, Seth, the *idea* of standing on ceremony with *me!* As if we hadn't played together here as children—to say nothing of my being your sister now!”

They had started now toward the orchard, and she continued:—

“Do you know, it seems as if I didn't know any-

body here but you—and even you almost make a stranger out of me. Poor Uncle Lemuel, he is so broken-down that he scarcely remembers me, and of course your Aunt and I couldn't be expected to get very intimate—you remember our dispute? Then John, he's very pleasant, and all that, but he isn't at all like the John I used to look up to so, the summer I was here. But you—you have hardly changed a bit. Of course," she made haste to add, for Seth's face did not reflect unalloyed gratification at this, "you have grown manly and big, and all that, but you haven't changed in your expression or manner. It's almost ten years—and I should have known you anywhere. But John *has* changed—he's more like a city man, or rather a villager, a compromise between city and country."

"Yes, I'm a countryman through and through, I suppose," said Seth, with something very like a sigh.

"John has seen a good deal of the world they tell me, and been on papers in large cities. I wonder how he can content himself with that little weekly in Thessaly after that."

"I don't think John has much ambition," answered Seth, meditatively. "He doesn't seem to care much how things go, if he only has the chance to say what he wants to say in print. It doesn't make any difference to him, apparently, whether all New York State reads what he writes, or only thirty or forty fellows in Dearborn County—he's just as well satisfied. And yet he's a very bright man, too. He might have gone to the Assembly last fall, if he

could have bid against Elhanan Pratt. He *will* go sometime, probably."

"Why, do you have an auction here for the Assembly?"

"Oh, no, but the man who's willing to pay a big assessment into the campaign fund can generally shut a poor candidate out. John didn't seem to mind much about being frozen out though—not half so much as I did, for him. Everybody in Thessaly knows him and likes him and calls him 'John,' and that seems to be the height of his ambition. I can't imagine a man of his abilities being satisfied with so limited a horizon."

"And, you, Seth, what is your horizon like?" asked Isabel.

They had entered the orchard path, now, and the apple blossoms close above them filled the May morning air with that sweet spring perfume which seems to tell of growth, harvest, the fruition of hope.

"Oh, I'm picked out to be a countryman all the days of my life I suppose." There was the sigh again, and a tinge of bitterness in his tone, as well.

"Oh, I hope not—that is, if you don't want to be. Oh, it must be such a dreary life! The very thought of it sets my teeth on edge. The dreadful people you have to know: men without an idea beyond crops and calves and the cheese-factory; women slaving their lives out doing bad cooking, mending for a houseful of men, devoting their scarce opportunities for intercourse with other women to the weakest and most wretched gossip; coarse servants

who eat at the table with their employers and call them by their Christian names; boys whose only theory about education is thrashing the school teacher, if it is a man, or breaking her heart by their mean insolence if it is a woman; and girls brought up to be awkward gawks, without a chance in life, since the brighter and nicer they are the more they will suffer from marriage with men mentally beneath them—that is, if they don't become sour old maids. I don't wonder you hate it all, Seth."

"You talk like a book," said Seth, in tones of unmistakable admiration. "I didn't suppose any woman could talk like that."

"I talk as I feel always, when I come into contact with country life, and I get angry with people who maunder about its romantic and picturesque side. Where is it, I should like to know?"

"Oh, it isn't all so bad as you paint it, perhaps, Isabel. Of course——" —here he hesitated a little —"you don't quite see it at its best here, you know. Father hasn't been a first-rate manager, and things have kind o' run down."

"No, Seth, it isn't that; the trail of the serpent is over it all—rich and poor, big and little. The Nineteenth century is a century of cities; they have given their own twist to the progress of the age—and the farmer is almost as far out of it as if he lived in Alaska. Perhaps there may have been a time when a man could live in what the poet calls daily communion with Nature and not starve his mind and dwarf his soul, but this isn't the century."

“But Webster was a farm boy, and so was Lincoln and Garfield and Jackson—almost all our great men. Hardly any of them are born in cities, you will find.”

“Oh, the country is just splendid to be born in, no doubt of that; but after you are born, get out of it as soon as you can.”

“I don't know as I can leave Father very well,” said Seth slowly, and as if in deep thought.

They walked to the end of the pasture beyond the orchard, to within view of the spot where all the Fairchilds for three generations had been laid, and where, among the clustering sweet-briars and wild-strawberry vines Milton had only yesterday dug a new grave. The sight recalled to both another subject, and no more was said of country life as they returned to the house. Indeed, little was said of any sort, for Seth had a thinking mood on. Nothing was very clear in his mind perhaps, but more distinctly than anything else he felt that existence on the farm had all at once become intolerable.

CHAPTER V.

THE FUNERAL.

THE American farm-house funeral is surely, of all the observances with which civilized man marks the ending of this earthly pilgrimage, the most pathetic. The rural life itself is a sad and sterile enough thing, with its unrelieved physical strain, its enervating and destructive diet, its mental barrenness, its sternly narrowed groove of toil and thought and companionship—but death on the farm brings a desolating gloom, a cruel sense of the hopelessness of existence, which one realizes nowhere else. The grim, fatalist habit of seizing upon the grotesque side, which a century of farm life has crystallized into what the world knows as American humor, is not wanting even in this hour; and the comforting conviction of immortality, of the shining reward to follow travail and sorrow, is nowhere more firmly insisted upon than among our country people. But the bleak environment of the closed life, the absence of real fellowship among the living, the melancholy isolation and vanity of it all, oppress the soul here with an intolerable weight which neither fund of sardonic spirits nor honest faith can lighten.

Something of this Isabel felt, as the mid-day meal

was hurried through, on Alvira's sharp intimation that the room couldn't be cleared any too soon, for the crowd would begin coming now, right along. There were three strangers at the table—though they seemed to be scarcely more strangers than the members of her husband's family—of whom two were clergymen.

One of these, who sat next to her, was the Episcopalian minister at Thessaly, a middle-aged, soft sort of man, with short hair so smooth and furry that she was conscious of an impulse to stroke it like a seal-skin, and little side-whiskers which reminded her of a baby brush. He impressed her as a stupid man, but in that she was mistaken. He was nervous and ill at ease, first because he could not successfully or gracefully use the narrow three-tined steel fork with a bone handle that had been given him, and second, because he did not understand the presence of the Rev. Stephen Bunce, who sat opposite him, offensively smacking his lips, and devoting to loud discourse periods which it seemed might better have been employed in mastication.

If quiet Mr. Turner was ill at ease, the Rev. Stephen was certainly not. He bestrode the situation like a modern Colossus. The shape of his fork did not worry him, since he used it only as a humble and lowly adjunct to his knife. The presence of Mr. Turner too, neither puzzled nor pained him. In fact, he was rather pleased than otherwise to have him there, where he could talk to him before sympathetic witnesses, and make him realise how

the man of the people who had a genuine call towered innately superior to mere benefited gentility. "Benefited gentility"—that was a good phrase, and he made a mental note of it for future use; then—the temptation was too strong—he bundled it neck and crop into the florid sentence with which he was addressing Albert—and looked at the Episcopalian to watch its effect.

Mr. Turner was occupied with his javelin-shaped fork, and did not seem to hear it.

Mr. Bunce suspected artifice in this, and watched the rector's meek face for a sign of secret confusion. After a moment he said, with his full, pompous voice at its loudest and most artificial pitch:—

"Ah, Mr. Turner, this is a sad occasion!"

The rector glanced up with some surprise, for he had not expected this overture, and answered "Yes, truly it is; extremely sad."

"Yet it is consoling to feel that even so sad an occasion can be converted into a means of grace, a season of spiritual solace as it were."

Mr. Turner only nodded assent to this; he felt that the whole company around the table, hired people and all, were eagerly watching him and the burly, bold-faced preacher opposite, as if they were about to engage in gladiatorial combat.

But Mr. Bunce would not permit the challenge to be declined. He stroked his ochre-hued chin whisker, looked complacently around the board, and asked:

"I s'pose you've brought your white and black riggins' along, eh? Or don't you wear 'em except in Church?"

There was a pained look in Mr. Turner's face; he made a little gesture toward the folding doors leading to the parlor, beyond which lay the dead, and murmured:

"It will be better, will it not, to speak of these matters together, after dinner?"

Again the Rev. Stephen glanced around the table, looking especially toward Miss Sabrina for approval, and remarked loftily:

"There is no need of concealment here, sir. It is all in the family here. We all know that the Mother in Israel who has departed was formerly of your communion, and if she wanted to have you here, sir, at her funeral, why well and good. But the rest of this sorrowin' family, sir, this stricken household, air Baptists—"

"I declare! there's the Burrells drivin' into the yard, a'ready!" said Alvira, rising from her chair abruptly. "If you're threw we better hustle these things aout, naow; you women won't more'n have time to dress 'fore they'll all be here."

The interruption seemed a welcome one to everybody, for there was a general movement on both sides of Mr. Bunce, which he, with his sentence unfinished, was constrained to join.

The third stranger, a small, elderly man with a mobile countenance and rusty black clothes, drew himself up, put on a modifiedly doleful expression,

and, speaking for the first time, assumed control of everything :

“ Naow, Milton, you ’n’ Leander git the table aout, ’n’ bring in all the extry chairs, ’n’ set ’em ’raound in rows. Squeeze ’em pooty well together in back, but the front ones kind o’ spread aout. You, Miss Sabriny, ’n’ the lady”—indicating Isabel with his thumb—“ ’n’ Annie ’d better go upstairs ’n’ git yer bonnets on, ’n’ things, ’n’ go ’n’ set in the room at the head o’ the stairs. You men, tew, git your gloves on, ’n’ naow be sure ’n’ have your hankch’fs in some pocket where you can git at ’em with your gloves on—’n’ have your hats in your hands, ’n’ then go ’n’ set with the ladies. Miss Sabriny, you’ll come daown arm-in-arm with yer brother, *when* I call, ’n’ then Albert ’n’ his wife, ’n’ John with Annie, ’n’ Seth with—pshaw, there’s odd numbers. Well, Seth can come alone. And dew keep step comin’ daown stairs !”

“ ’N’ naow, gents,” turning to the Rev. Mr. Turner, “ your gaown’s in the fust room to the right on the landin’, and if you ”—addressing Mr. Bunce—“ will go up with him, and arrange ’baout the services, so’s to come daown together—it’ll look pootier than to straggle in by yourselves,—’N’ you, Milton, ain’t you got somethin’ besides overalls to put on ?”

Thus the autocrat cleared the living room. Then, going around through the front hall, he entered the parlor to receive, with solemn dignity and a fine eye to their relative social merit, the first comers.

These were almost exclusively women, dressed in

Sunday garb. As each buggy or democrat wagon drove up inside the gate, and discharged its burden, the men would lead the horses further on, to be hitched under or near the shed, and then saunter around to the kitchen side of the house, where cider was on tap, and other men were standing in the sunshine, chewing tobacco and conversing in low tones, while the women from each conveyance went straight to the front door, and got seats in the parlor as close to the coffin as possible. The separation of the sexes could hardly have been more rigorous in a synagogue. There were, indeed two or three meek, well-brushed men among the women, sitting, uncomfortable but resigned, in the geranium-scented gloom of the curtained parlor, but, as the more virile brethren outside would have said, they were men who didn't count.

The task of the undertaker was neither light nor altogether smooth. There were some dozen chairs reserved, nearest the pall, for the mourners, the clergymen and the mixed quartette expected from Thessaly. Every woman on entering made for these chairs, and the more unimportant and "low-down" she was in the rural scale of social values, the more confidently she essayed to get one of them. With all of these more or less argument was necessary—conducted in a buzzing whisper from which some squeak or guttural exclamation would now and again emerge. With some, the undertaker was compelled to be quite peremptory; while one woman—Susan Jane Squires, a slatternly, weak-eyed creature who

presumed upon her position as sister-in-law of Milton, the hired man—had actually to be pushed away by sheer force.

Then there was the further labor of inducing all these disappointed ones to take the seats furthest back, so that late comers might not have to push by and over them, but efforts in this direction were only fitful at the best, and soon were practically abandoned.

“Fust come, fust sarved!” said old Mrs. Wimple. “I’m jes ez good ez them that’ll come bimeby, ’n’ ef I don’ mind their climbin’ over me, *you* needn’t!” and against this the undertaker could urge nothing satisfactory.

In the intervals of that functionary’s activity, conversation was quite general, carried on in whispers which, in the aggregate, sounded like the rustle of a smart breeze through the dry leaves of a beach tree. Many women were there who had never been in the house before—could indeed, have had no other chance of getting in. These had some fleeting interest in the funeral appointments, and the expense incident thereto, but their chief concern was the furnishing of the house. They furtively scraped the carpet with their feet to test its quality, they felt of the furniture to see if it had been re-varnished, they estimated the value of the curtains, speculated on the cost of the melodeon and its age, wondered when the ceiling had last been whitewashed. Some, who knew the family better, discussed the lamentable decline of the Fairchilds

in substance and standing within their recollection, and exchanged hints about the endemic mortgage stretching its sinister hand even to the very chairs they were sitting on. Others, still more intimate, rehearsed the details of the last and fatal illness, commented on the character of individuals in the family, and guessed how long old Lemuel would last, now that Cicely was gone.

In the centre of these circling waves of gossip lay the embodiment of the eternal silence. Listening, one might fain envy such an end to that living death of mental starvation which was the lot of all there, and which forced them, out of their womanhood, to chatter in the presence of death.

The singers came. They were from the village, belonging to the Congregational church there, and it was understood that they came out of liking for John Fairchild. None of the gathering knew them personally, but it was said that the contralto—the woman with the bird on her bonnet, who took her seat at the melodeon—had had trouble with her husband. A fresh buzz of whispering ran round. Some stray word must have reached the contralto, for she colored and pretended to study the music before her intently, and, later, when “Pleyel’s Hymn” was being sung, she played so nervously that there was an utter collapse in the sharps and flats of the third line, which nearly threw the singers out.

The undertaker now stalked in, and stood on tip-toe to see if the back room was also filled. He had

been out with the men at the kitchen door, fixing crape on the arms of six of the best dressed and most respectable looking farmers in an almost jocular mood, and drilling them affably in their duties ; drinking cider, exchanging gossip with one or two acquaintances, and conducting himself generally like an ordinary mortal. He had now resumed his dictatorship.

Most of the men had followed him around to the front of the house, and clustered now in the hall, or in a group about the outer door, holding their hats on a level with their shoulders.

A rustle on the stairs told that the mourners were descending. Then came the strains of the melodeon, and the singing, very low, solemn and sweet.

A little pause, and the full voice of the Baptist preacher was heard in prayer—then in some eulogistic remarks. What he said was largely nonsense, from any point of view, but the voice was that of the born exhorter, deep, clear-toned, melodious ; there seemed to be a stop in it, as in an organ, which at pathetic parts gave forth a tremulous, weeping sound, and when this came, not a dry eye could be found. He was over-fond of using this effect, as are most men possessing the trick, but no one noticed it, not even Isabel, who from sitting sternly intolerant of the whispering women around her, and indignant at Mr. Bunce for his dinner performance, found herself sobbing with all the rest when the tremulo stop was touched.

There was more singing, this time fine, simple old "St. Denis" and then the bearers were summoned in.

The men asked one another in murmurs outside if the Episcopal clergyman was to take no part in the services. Within, Mrs. Wimple went straighter to the point. She plucked him by the sleeve of his robe and leaning over with some difficulty, for she was a corpulent body, whispered to the hearing of a score of her neighbours :

"What air you here fer, mister, if you ain't goin' to say nor dew nothin'?"

"I officiate at the grave," he had said, and then regretted all the remainder of the day having answered her at all.

On the return of the procession from the little knoll where the slate and marble tomb-stones of long dead Fairchilds bent over the new brown mound, Annie and Seth walked together. There was silence between them for a time, which he broke suddenly.

"It's *all* very hard, Annie, for you know how much mother and I loved each other. But, truly, the hardest thing of all is to think of staying here among these narrow dolts. While she was here I could stand it. But I can't any more."

Annie said nothing. She felt his arm trembling against hers, and his voice was strained and excited. What *could* she say?

"They're not like me," he went on; "I have

nothing in common with them. I hate the sight of the whole of them. I never realised till to-day how big a gulf there was between them and me. Didn't *you* see it—what a mean, narrow-contracted lot they all were?"

"Who do you mean, Seth?"

"Why all of them. The Burrells, the Wimples, old Elhanan Pratt, old Lyman Tenney, that fellow Bunce—the whole lot of them. And the women too! Did you watch them—or, what's worse, did you hear them? I wonder you can bear them yourself, Annie, any more than I can."

"Sometimes it *is* hard, Seth, I admit; when I first came back to grandma from school it was awfully hard. But then I've got to live here, and reconcile myself to what the place offers,—and, after all, Seth, they are well-meaning people, and some of them are smart, too, in their way."

"Oh, well-meaning—in their way,—yes! But I haven't got to live here, Annie, and I haven't got to reconcile myself, and I *won't!* That's the long and short of it. I can make my living elsewhere—perhaps more than my living—and be among people who don't make me angry every time I set eyes on them. And I can find friends, too, who feel as I do, and look at things as I do, instead of these country louts who only know abominable stories, and these foolish girls—who—who—"

"Nobody can blame you to-day, Seth, for feeling blue and sore, but you ought not to talk so, even now. They're not all like what you say. Reuben

Tracy, now, he's been a good friend and a useful friend to you."

"Yes, Rube's a grand, good fellow, of course. I know all that. But then just take his case. He's a poor schoolmaster now, just as he was five years ago, and will be twenty years from now. What kind of a life is that for a man?"

"And maybe the girls *are*—foolish, as you started to say, but—"

"Now, Annie, don't think I meant anything by that, *please!* I know you're the dearest girl and the best friend in the world. Truly, now, you won't think I meant anything, will you?"

"No, Seth, I won't" said Annie softly. It was her arm that trembled now.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE NAME OF THE FAMILY.

MISS SABRINA sat by her accustomed window an hour after the return from the grave, waiting for Albert. The mourning dress, borrowed for the occasion from a neighbor, was cut in so modern a fashion, contrasted with the venerable maiden's habitual garments, that it gave her spare figure almost a fantastic air. The bonnet, with its yard of dense, coarse ribbed crape, lay on the table at her elbow, beside her spectacles and the unnoticed Bible. Miss Sabrina was ostensibly looking out of the window, but she really saw nothing. She was thinking very steadily about the coming interview with her nephew, and what she would say to him, and wondering, desponding, hoping about his answers.

The door opened, and Albert entered. "You wanted to see me, Aunt, so Annie said," he remarked gravely, in a subdued tone.

She motioned him to a chair and answered, in a solemn voice curiously like his own: "Yes, there's some things I want to say to you, all by yourself."

They sat for some moments in silence, the lawyer watching his aunt with amiable forbearance, as if conscious that his time was being wasted, and she, poor

woman, groping in a novel mental fog for some suitable phrases with which to present her views. Under Albert's calm, uninspiring gaze those views seemed to lose form, and diminish in intelligence as much as in distinctness. It had all been so clear to her mind—and now she suddenly found it fading off into a misty jumble of speculations, mere castles in the air. She had expected to present an unanswerable case lucidly and forcibly to her lawyer nephew; instead, it seemed increasingly probable that he would scout the thing as ridiculous—and, what was worse, be justified in so doing. So it was that she finally made her beginning doubtfully, almost dolefully:

“Of course I dunno haow you feel abaout it, Albert, but I can't help thinking something ought to be settled abaout th' farm, while yer here.”

“Settled? How settled?” asked Albert. There was a dry, dispassionate fibre in his voice which further chilled her enthusiasm.

“Why—well—you knaow—what I mean, Albert,” she said, almost pathetically. It was so hard to know just how to say things to Albert.

“On the contrary, I don't in the least know what you mean. What do you want settled about the farm? What is there to settle about it?”

“Oh, nothin', ef yeh don't choose to understand” said Miss Sabrina.”

Another period of silence ensued. Albert made a movement as if to rise, and said:

“If there is'nt anything more, I think I'll go down again.”

There was an artificial nicety of enunciation about this speech, which grated on the old lady's nerves. She squared her shoulders and turned upon her nephew.

"Naow what's the use of bein' mean, Albert? Yeh dew knaow what I'm thinking of, jis' ez well ez I dew! Yeh unly want to make it ez hard fer me to tell yeh as yeh possibly kin. I s'pose thet's the lawyer of it!"

Albert smiled with all his face but the eyes, and slightly lifting his hands from his fat knees, turned them palms up, in mute deprecation of his aunt's unreasonableness. The gesture was as near the shoulder-shrug as the self-contained lawyer ever permitted himself to go. It was a trifle, but it angered the old maid enough to remove the last vestige of hesitation from her tongue:

"Well, ef yeh *don't* knaow what I mean, then I'll tell yeh! I mean that ef th' Fairchilds are goin' to be a Dearborn caounty fam'ly, 'n' hole their heads up amongst folks, ther's got to be a change o' some sort right away. Your father's let everything slide year after year, till there's pesky little lef' naow to slide on. He's behine hand agin in money matters, even with th' Pratt mortgage on top of t'others. What's wuss, it's in everybody's maouth. They've left him off th' board at th' cheese-factory this year, even; of course they say, it's cuz he never 'tended th' meetin's—but I knaow better! It's jis cuz Lemuel Fairchild's goin' deown hill, 'n' the farm's goin' to rack 'n' ruin, 'n' ev'rybuddy

knaows it. Jis' think of it? Why, 'twas th' Fairchilds made that cheese-factory, 'n' it's allus gone by aour name, 'n' we used to sen' th' milk of a hundred 'n' thirty caows there—almost as much as all th' rest of 'em put together—'n' ez I said to Leander Crump, when he was squirmin' raound tryin' to make me b'lieve they didn't mean nothin' by droppin' Lemuel aout o' th' board, says I—'nobuddy ever 'spected a table spoonful o' water in aour milk!'—'n' he colored up, *I tell yeh!*"

"No doubt" said Albert, impassively.

Miss Sabrina paused to mentally retrace her argument, and see if this remark had any special bearing. She could discover none, and grew a little angrier.

"Well, then, th' question's right here. My father, your grand father, made a name fer hissself, and a place for his fam'ly, here in Dearborn caounty, second to nobuddy. Fer years 'n' years I kin remember that th' one question people ast, when it was proposed to dew anything, was 'what does Seth Fairchild think 'baout it?' He went to th' Senate twice; he could 'a gone to Congress from this dees-trick time 'n' time agin, if he'd be'n a mine to. Ev'rybuddy looked up to him. When he died, all of a suddent, he lef' Lemuel th' bes' farm, th' bes' stock, th' bes' farm haouse, fer miles raound. Well, thet's forty year ago. I've lived here threw it all. I've swallered my pride every day in th' week, all thet time. I've tried to learn myself a humble spirit—but I've hed to see this place, and the fam'ly, going daown, daown, daown!"

There were tears in the old maid's eyes now, as she spoke, tears of mortification and revolt against her helplessness, for she seemed to read the failure of her appeal in the placid face of her nephew, with its only decent pretence of interest. She went on, with a rising voice:

“You know a little of how things hev' gone, though you've allus took precious good pains to know ez little ez yeh could. You know that when you were a boy you were a rich man's son, with yer pony, 'n' yer dancin' lessons, 'n' yer college eddication; 'n' yer mother dressed well, 'n' had a kerridge, 'n' visited with th' bes' people of Albany, people who were *my* friends tew when I used to go to Albany with yer grandfather. 'N' what hev we come to? Yer mother slaved her life aout, lost all her ambition, lost all her pride, saw things goin' to th' dogs and didn't know how to stop 'em—sakes forbid thet I should say anything agin Sissy; she did all she could; p'raps 'twould 'ev gone different if she'd be'n a different kine o' woman, p'raps not; there's no use talkin' 'baout thet. 'N' ef I'd hed *my* say, tew, maybe things'd be'n different; but its ez it is, 'n' it's no use cryin' over spilt milk.

“Father never meant to be hard with me. When he lef' me nothin' but a living aout o' th' farm, he expected, everybuddy expected, my Aunt Sabrina'd leave me a clean sixty thousand dollars when she died. She was an ole woman, 'n' a widow, 'n' she hed no childern. She'd allus promised my father thet if I was named after her—confaound her name!—I

shaould be her heir. 'N' then, less'n a year after his death, what does the old huzzy up 'n' do but marry some fortune hunter young enough to be her son, 'n' give him every cent she hed in the world. He led her a fine dance of it, tew, 'n' serve her right! But there I was, lef' 'thaout a thing 'cep a roof over my head.

“ 'N' then Lemuel, nothin' ud do but he must go to Californy when the gold cry riz, 'n' no sooner 'd he git there than he was homesick 'n' hed to come back; 'n' when he got back, 'n' begun to hear what fortunes them who'd gone aout with him were a making, than he must start aout again. But where it 'd be'n wilderness a few months b'fore, he faound cities naow, 'n' ev'ry chance took up; then he got robbed o' all his money, 'n' hed to borrar, 'n' then he took chills 'n' fever off th' isthmus, 'n' hed to lay in quarantine fer weeks, on 'caount o' th' yellah fever; it 'd be'n a poor year on the farm, 'n' when he got back, it took ev'ry cent of his ready-money to set himself right.

“ From thet day to this, his Californy luck hez stuck to him like death to a nigger, tell here, to-day, the Fitches don't think it wuth while to come to your poor mother's fun'ral—I kin remember Lije Fitch when he was glad enough to beg beans o' my father fer seed—'n' I m wearing borrered mournin' of Sarah Andrewses, *a mile tew big for me!* ”

“ It seems to me I've been told all this a good many times, Aunt Sabrina,” said Albert, as his aunt stopped and glared at him trembling with the ex-

citement of her peroration. "There's nothing very pleasant in it, for either of us, to listen to or talk about; but I don't see that there's anything more than I've heard over and over again, except about your having on another woman's dress, and I don't assume that I am expected to interfere about *that!*"

Poor Miss Sabrina was too deeply moved, and too much in earnest, to note the sarcastic levity underlying the lawyer's conclusion. She caught only the general sense of a negative response, and looked at her nephew steadily with a gaze half-indignant, half appealing.

"Then you won't dew anything, ay?" she asked at last.

"Oh, I am very far from saying that. *That's* another thing. You send for me, saying that you have an important communication to make to me—at least, I assume that it is important, from the circumstances surrounding the request. I come, and you first insist that I know as well as you do what you mean, and then, when I demur, you rehearse all the unfortunate details of my father's failure in life. I suggest that these are already tolerably familiar to me, and *this* mild statement you construe as a definite refusal on my part to do something—what, I don't know."

"I declare, Albert, you better send in a bill fer givin' me this consultation. *I* never knew a son who could take his father's ruin 'n' his fam'ly's disgrace so cool, before. I s'pose *that's* th' lawyer of it, tew!"

“Perhaps it’s an advantage that some one of the family should keep cool, Aunt, and look at things one by one, in their true relation. Now, if you have any proposition to make to me, any plan to present for my consideration, I should like to hear it—because really this other style of conversation is profitless beyond description. In a word, what do you want me to do?”

“What do I want yeh to do?” The old maid leaned forward and put a thin, mitted hand on Albert’s knee, looking eagerly into his face, and speaking almost shrilly. “I want yeh to take this farm, to come here to live, to make it a rich gentleman’s home agin! to put the Fairchilds up once more where my father left ’em.”

“Yes?” was the provokingly unenthusiastic response.

Miss Sabrina felt that she had failed. She put her spectacles on, and took the Bible into her lap, as if to say that she washed her hands of all mundane matters. But it did not suit Albert to regard the interview as closed.

“There is one thing you don’t seem to see at all, Aunt,” he said. “That is, that Dearborn County is relatively not altogether the most important section of the Republic, and that it is quite possible for a man to win public recognition or attain professional distinction in other communities which might reconcile him to a loss of prestige here. It may sound like heresy to you, but I am free to admit that the good opinion of the business men of New York city,

where I am regarded as a successful sort of man, seems to me to outweigh all possible questions as to how I am regarded by Elhanan Pratt and Leander Crump and—and that Baptist gentleman, for instance, whom you had here to-day. The world has grown so large, my dear aunt, since your day, that there are thousands upon thousands of Americans now who go all their lives without ever once thinking about Dearborn County's opinion. Of course I can understand how deeply you must feel what you regard as a social decline in the eyes of your neighbours. But truly, it does not specially affect me. They are not my neighbours; if I seem to them to be of less importance than I was in my boyhood, when I had a pony, I can't help it, and I am sure I don't want to. Frankly, to use my mother's old phrase, I don't care a cotton hat for their opinion good, bad, or indifferent. It is this, I think, which you leave out of your calculation."

Miss Sabrina had listened, with the Book opened only by a finger's width. The elaborate irony of her nephew's words had escaped her, but she saw a gleam of hope in his willingness to discuss the matter at all.

"But then this is the home o' the Fairchilds; the fam'ly belongs to Dearborn Caounty; father was allus spoken of ez Seth Fairchild o' Dearborn, jis' as much ez—ez Silas Wright o' Dutchess."

"Of course that last is a powerful argument," said Albert with a furtive smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. "But, after all, the county family

idea doesn't seem to attract me much. Why, aunt, do you know that your grandfather Roger was a journeyman shoemaker, who walked all the way here from Providence. There was nothing incongruous in his son becoming a Senator. Very well; if you have a state of society where sudden elevations of this sort occur, there will inevitably be corresponding descents—just as lean streaks alternate with fat in the bacon of commerce. The Fairchilds went up—they come down. They have exhausted the soil. Do you see?"

"Nao! I don't see a bit! 'N' I b'lieve at heart you're jis' ez praoud ez I be!"

"Proud? Yes! Proud of myself, proud of my practice, proud of my position. But proud because three or four hundred dull countrymen, seeing my cows sleek, my harness glossy, my farm well in order, and knowing that my grandfather had been a State Senator, would consider me a 'likely' man—no, not at all."

Albert rose at this to go, and added, as he turned the door-knob:

"As soon as he's equal to it, Aunt Sabrina, I'll get father to go over his affairs with me, and I'll try and straighten them out a trifle. I dare say we can find some way out of the muddle."

"But yeh won't take up the thing yerself? Yeh won't dew what I wanted yeh tew?"

The lawyer smiled, and said: "What really? Come here and be a farmer?"

Miss Sabrina had risen, too, and came toward her

nephew. "No" she said, "not a farmer. Be a country gentleman, 'n'—'n'—a Congressman!"

Albert smiled again, and left the room. He smiled to himself going down the stairs, and narrowly escaped forgetting to change his expression of countenance when he entered the living room, where were sitting people who had not entirely forgotten the fact that it was a house of mourning.

For Albert had a highly interesting idea in his mind, both interesting and diverting. Curiously enough, he had begun developing it from the moment when his aunt first disclosed her ambition for him. At the last moment, in a blind way she had suggested the first political office that entered her mind as an added bribe. She could not know that her astute nephew had, from the first suggestion of her plan, been trying to remember whether it was Jay and Adams Counties, or Jay and Morgan, that were associated with Dearborn in the Congressional district; or that, when she finally in despair said "Be a country gentleman and a Congressman," his brain had already turned over a dozen projects in as many seconds, every one Congressional.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREE BROTHERS.

AFTER the early supper of stale bread, saltless butter, dark dried apple sauce, and chippy cake had been disposed of, Lemuel returned to his rocking chair by the stove, Aunt Sabrina and Isabel took seats, each at a window, and read by the fading light, and Albert put on his hat, lighted a cigar, and went out. His brother John stood smoking a pipe in the yard, leaning against the high well-curb, his hands deep in his pantaloons pocket, and his feet planted far to the front and wide apart. Seth was coming from the barns toward the well, with a bucket in his hand. Albert walked across to the curb, and the three brothers were alone together for the first time in years.

“It does one good to be out of doors such an evening as this,” said Albert. “It seems to me it would be better if father would get out in the open air more, instead of sitting cooped up over that stove all the while.”

“When a man’s been out in the open air, rain or shine, snow or blow, for fifty years, he ought to have earned the right to stay inside, if he wants to. That’s about the only reward there is at the end of a farmer’s life,” answered Seth, turning the calf-

bucket upside down beside John, and sitting on it. Seth had his old clothes on once more, and perhaps there was some consciousness of the contrast between his apparel and that of his black-clad brethren in the truculent tone of his reply.

John had nodded at Albert on his approach, and thrust his feet a trifle further forward. He still stood silent, looking meditatively at the row of poplars on the other side of the road through rings of pipe smoke.

“So you don’t think much of farm work, eh?” said Albert.

“Who does?” replied Seth, sententiously.

A considerable period of silence ensued. Albert had never had a very high idea of his younger brothers’ conversational qualities, and had rarely known how to talk easily with them, but to-night it seemed a greater task than ever. He offered them cigars, in a propitiatory way. Seth accepted and lit one; John said “Thanks, I prefer a pipe,” and silence reigned again.

It was twilight now, and in the gathering dusk there was no sign of motion about, nor any sound save the tinkle of a sheep-bell in the pasture opposite.

John’s pipe burned out, and Albert pressed a cigar upon him again.

“I *want* you to try them,” he said, almost pleadingly, “I’m sure you’ll like them. They are a special brand the steward at the Union League gets for me.”

This time John consented, and he seemed to feel that the act involved a responsibility to talk, for he said, with an effort at amiability as he struck a match :

“Your wife seems to be looking very well.”

“Yes, Isabel's health is perfect, and it always benefits her to get out in the country. That's a kind of Irishism isn't it? I mean it makes her good health more obvious.”

“Good health is a great thing,” John answered.

The conversation was running emptings again, almost at the start. Albert made a heroic effort to strengthen it.

“Well, this is a regular quakers' meeting,” he said, briskly. “We see each other so seldom, we are almost strangers when we do meet. I want to be frank with you, come now, and you should be frank with me. You have something on your minds, I can see. Isn't it something I ought to know?”

Seth spoke again : “Perhaps on the evening of one's mother's funeral it isn't to be expected that even brothers should feel chatty.”

The village journalist felt the injustice of this comment from the youngster.

“No, Seth,” he said, “Don't snap Albert up in that fashion. I dare say he feels the thing, in his own way, as much as the rest of us. You are right, Albert ; there *is* something, and I'll teil you plainly what it is. Do you see those poplars over there? In the morning their shadows come almost to our front door. Father planted them with his own hands.

When I was a boy, I used to play over there, and climb up on to the bolls, and pretend I was to build houses there, like in Swiss Family Robinson. Well, that land passed out of our hands so long ago—it's been an old story for years. Do you see the roof of the red school-house over back of the hill?" turning toward the South. "Or no, the light is too poor now, but you know where it is. When I used to cut 'cross lots to school there, I went the whole way over father's land. Now, if I wanted to go there, how many people would I trespass on, Seth?"

"Ferguson owns the clover meadow, and Pratt has the timothy meadow, and what we used to call the berry patch belongs to Sile Thomas; he's begun to build a house on it."

"Precisely. Why, even the fence close to where mother's grave is, divides ours from another man's land now."

"Sabrina spoke to me about all this this afternoon," said Albert hesitatingly, "and I tried, as I often have before, to make her understand that that must be the natural course of affairs, so long as the East tries to compete with the West in farming."

"Well that may be all right, but Elhanan Pratt seems to manage to compete with the West, as you call it, and so do the Fergusons and all the rest of them. We are the only ones who appear to get left, every time. Of course, it's somebody's fault. Father's been a poor manager, no use of denying that. But that doesn't make it any the easier to bear. Father hardly knows which way to turn for

money; he might have scraped through the year if hops had had a good season, but at nine cents a pound it was hardly worth while to take them to the depot. You can't clear expenses at less than eleven cents. And then if he does have a fairly decent year, his hop-pickers are always the most drunken, idle gang of them all, who eat their heads off, and steal more fruit and chickens than they pick boxes, and if anybody's hops are spoiled in the kiln, you can bet on their being Fairchild's, every time. And three years ago, it was the hop merchant who failed, just at the opportune moment, and let Father in for a whole year's profit and labor. Of course, it's all bad luck, mismanagement, whatever you like to call it, and it can't be helped, I suppose. But it makes a man sour, and it broke poor mother's heart. And then here's Seth."

"Oh, never mind me, I can stand it, I guess, if the rest can. I'm not complaining" came from the figure on the bucket—only dimly to be seen now, in the shadow of the curb, and the increasing darkness.

"Here's Seth," continued John, without noting the disclaimer. "You and I had *some* advantages—of course, mine were not to be compared with yours, but still I was given a chance, such as it was and I don't know that I would trade what I learned at work during college years for a college education—but this poor boy, who's thought about him, who's given him a chance to show what's in him? He's been allowed to come up as he could, almost like any farm laborer. His mother tried to do her little, but

what spirit did she have for it, and what time did the drudgery here give him? Thank God! He's had the stuff in him to work at education himself, and he's got the making of the best man of us three. But it's no thanks to you. And *that's* why we feel hard, Albert. Nobody supposes you could make a good farmer and manager out of father; nobody blames you for a bad hop season, or the dishonesty of Biggs. But I do say that of us three brothers there's one who frets and worries over the thing, and though he's a poor man, does all he can afford to do, and more too, to help make it better; and there's another, young, ambitious, capable, whose nose is held down to the grindstone, and the best years of whose life are being miserably spent in a hopeless wrestling with debt and disaster; and there's a third brother, the oldest brother, rich, easy, enjoying all the luxuries of life, who don't give a damn about it all! *That's* what I say, and if you don't like it, you needn't!"

The silence which ensued was of the kind that can be felt. The two cigars at the corners of the old curb glowed intermittently in the darkness. John's had gone out during his speech, and as he re-lighted it, the glare of the match showed an excited, indignant face. There was no room for doubt, after the momentary exhibit which the red light made, that John was very much in earnest.

Albert was thinking laboriously on his answer. Meantime, he said, to fill the interval "Do you like the cigar?"

“Yes; a fifteen center, isn't it?”

Albert had it in his mind to say truthfully that he paid \$180 per thousand, but the fear of invidious comparisons rose before him in time, and he said “About that, I think.”

He waited a moment, still meditating, and threw out another stop-gap: “It's curious how the rhetorical habit grows on a man who writes leading articles. I noticed that you used three adjectives every time, the regular cumulative thing, you know.”

“Maybe so; it would be more to the purpose to hear what you think about the spirit of my oration; the form doesn't matter so much.”

“Well, I will tell you, John,” said Albert, slowly, still feeling his way, “to speak frankly, no doubt there's a good deal in what you say. I feel that there is. But you ought to consider that it isn't easy for a man living in a great city, immersed in business cares, and engrossed in the labors of his profession, to realise all these things, and see them as you, who are here on the ground, see them. It's hardly fair to attack me as heartless, when you present these facts to me for the first time.”

“For the first time! You ought to have seen them for yourself without presenting. And then you said Sabrina had often discussed the subject with you.”

“Oh, but her point of view is always family dignity, the keeping up of the Fairchilds' homestead in baronial state, and that sort of thing. You should

have heard her this afternoon, telling me how her father's name used to be coupled with Dearborn County, just as Silas Wright's was with Dutchess—either Dutchess or Delaware, I forget which she said—but it was very funny.”

“Sabrina and I haven't spoken for I don't know how long, and we're not likely to again in a hurry, but for all that I'm bound to say I wish some others of the family had as much pride as she's got,” said John. “Whatever else she may be, she's as loyal and as faithful to the family idea, as jealous of the family's name, as any old Spanish grandee. And I confess the Silas Wright thing doesn't seem funny to me at all—any fellow with the right kind of a heart in him would feel that it was deucedly pathetic—the poor old maid clinging through the shipwreck to that one spar of support—the recollection of a time when her father was bigger than his county. Such things oughtn't to be laughed at.”

Albert lost his patience. “Confound it, man, do you want to force me into a quarrel—this night of all others! By George, was there ever such a brace of brothers! I come out here to get you by yourselves, to talk over with you some plans that have occurred to me for setting things right here—and I haven't had a civil answer yet from either of you. First it's the youngster who scowls and snarls at me, and then you read me lofty lectures on my behavior, and then both together in concerted condemnation. No wonder I come rarely to the farm! It's enough to sicken any man of family ties, to be bullyragged

in this way. I've a good mind to tell you you can all go to the devil, and be hanged to you!"

The figure on the bucket rose to its feet with a spring, so energetically that there seemed a menace in the action. The village editor restrained this movement with a quiet hand, and a whispered "Keep cool, Seth." Then he said with exaggerated calmness of voice:

"Personally, perhaps I shouldn't mind much if you did. But there are others to look after, and so, before you do, it might be worth while to learn what the fine alternative was to have been. It would be a great pity to not even to hear these noble plans with which you were primed, you say, when you came out."

"But you must admit, John, that you and Seth tonight have been enough to try the patience of a saint."

"Oh, yes, we admit that. Go on!"

"Well, you've made it a little difficult for me to develop my plans—they were scarcely formed in my mind. In a general way, I wanted to consult you about freeing the farm, perhaps buying back some of the original land that has gone, putting the house in shape again, improving the stock, placing Father and Sabrina beyond the chance of ever being embarrassed again—and—and—doing something for Seth."

"Nobody wants you—" began the impatient Seth.

"Youngster, *you* shut up!" said John, again using the quieting hand. "Do you really mean all this, Albert?"

“I should scarcely have spoken in detail as I have, otherwise,” answered the lawyer loftily.

“Well, this—” said John, “this takes a fellow’s breath away.”

“If you hadn’t been in such haste to impute bad motives and convict me without judge or jury, perhaps the effect of my plans might not have been so overpowering.”

“Yes, we did you an injustice, Albert, clearly we did. We were full of the idea that all these troubles rolled off you like water off a duck’s back. It seems that was our mistake. But—what’s your scheme?”

“Definitely, I have none, except to do all I can, in the way we may decide will be best all around. I have been thinking some of coming to live here myself, say from May to November of each year, and taking the farm into my own hands.”

“H’m—m! That might have its advantages, perhaps—*but*—”

“Oh, I know what you mean. If I do, everybody’s rights shall be respected. We’ll fix that beyond question, to your satisfaction, before a thing is done.”

“I don’t care about myself, particularly; you know that: but then there’s Seth, you know—we’ve always figured on the farm as his. It’s true he don’t want to be a farmer, that he hates the whole thing, but still that represents all his capital, so to speak, and—”

“My dear John, that shall all be arranged. I am a childless man—probably always shall be. As long as Father lives the farm shall remain in his name. Either his will can be in my favor, or I can manage

the farm as a trustee for all three of us, after he's gone. In either case, you shall both be protected in turn by my will—absolutely protected. Meantime, what do you want me to do for Seth? What does he want to do?"

"Nothing needs to be done for me," began Seth, "I can—"

"Now, youngster, *will* you be quiet!" said John, in mock despair. "I'll tell you what you can do for Seth, and do easily. Get him a place on some decent newspaper, in New York or one of the larger cities of the State, and let him have money enough to eke out a small salary at first, so that he can begin at editorial work instead of tramping up through the reporter's treadmill, as I had to. That's all Seth'll ask, and it will be the making of him."

"Begin at editorial work—Seth? Nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it. For two years back Seth has been doing some of the best work on my paper—work that's been copied all over the State."

"Bless my soul, what a literary family we are!" said the lawyer. "Does Aunt Sabrina write, too? Perhaps those love poems you have on the last page are hers."

John continued without noticing the interjection. "Do you remember that long article on Civil Service Reform we had in the *Banner* last January?"

o "I don't think I do, John. To be frank, although we enjoy having you send us the *Banner* immensely, occasionally it happens that the stress of professional duties compels me to miss reading a number."

"Well that article was reprinted in all the big papers, from Boston to Chicago. I never knew any other thing from a little village paper to travel so far, or attract so much attention. I had lots of letters about it, too. That article was Seth's—all his own. I didn't change a word in it. And he's hardly seen any thing of the world yet, either."

The lawyer was heard chuckling, when John's voice died away in the darkness. The cigars had long since burned out, and the men could with difficulty see one another. The two younger brothers waited, the one surprised, the other increasingly indignant, to learn the cause of Albert's hilarity.

"Do you realise, John," he said at last, with merriment still in his voice, "what a delightful commentary on Civil Service Reform your words make. The best article on that doctrine is written by a youngster who has never left the farm, who doesn't know the difference between a Custom House and a letter-box on a lamp-post! Ho, ho, I must tell that to Chauncey when I see him."

An hour later, John and Seth still leaned against the mossy curb, smoking and talking over the words of their elder brother, who sometime before had gone in to avoid the dew-fall.

"I wonder if we *have* misjudged him, after all," said Seth. "I'm almost ashamed to accept his favors, after the way I pitched into him."

"I wonder what his scheme really is," mused the more experienced village editor.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALBERT'S PLANS.

IT became generally known, before Sunday came again, that Albert was to take the farm, and that Seth was to go to the city—known not only along the rough, lonesome road leading over the Burfield hills, which had once been a proud turnpike, with hospitable taverns at every league, and the rumbling of great coaches and the horn of the Postboy as echoes of its daily life of bustle and profit, and now was a solitary thoroughfare to no place in particular, with three or four gaunt old farmhouses, scowling in isolation, to the mile—not only on this road, and at the four corners below, but even at Thessaly people learned of the coming change as if by magic, and discussed it as a prime sensation. It need not be added that the story grew greatly in telling—grew too ponderous to remain an entity, and divided itself into several varying and, ultimately, fiercely conflicting sections.

The Misses Cheesborough had the best authority for saying that Albert had acted in the most malignant and shameful manner, seizing the farm, and turning poor Seth out of doors, and it was more than a suspicion in their minds that the feeble old father would soon be railroaded off to an asylum.

On the other hand, Miss Tabitha Wilcox, who by superior vigor and resource held her own very well against the combined Misses Cheesbrough, knew, absolutely *knew*, that Albert had behaved most handsomely, paying off all the mortgages, making a will in favor of John and Seth, and agreeing to send Seth to College, and what was more, Miss Tabitha would not be surprised, though some others might be, if the public-spirited Albert erected a new library building in Thessaly as a donation to the village.

Between these two bold extremes there was room for many shades of variation in the story, and many original bents of speculation. Down at the cheese factory they even professed to have heard that a grand coal deposit had been surreptitiously discovered on the Fairchild farm, and that Albert was merely the agent of a syndicate of city speculators who would presently begin buying all the land roundabout. Old Elhanan Pratt did not credit this, but he did write to his son in Albany, a clerk in one of the departments, to find out if a charter for a railroad near Thessaly had been applied for. The worst of it was, neither John nor Seth would talk, and as for Albert, he had gone back to New York, leaving his wife behind.

On the farm the fortnight following the funeral passed without event. In the lull of field labor which precedes haying time, there was not much for Seth to do. He went down to the river several times on solitary fishing trips; it seemed to him

now that he was saying farewell not only to the one pastime which never failed him in interest or delight, but to the valley itself, and the river. How fond he was of the stream, and all its belongings!

More like home than even the old farmhouse on the hill seemed some of these haunts to which he now said good-bye—the shadowed pool under the butternut tree, with its high steep bank of bare clay where, just under the overhanging cornice of sod, the gypsy swallows had made holes for their nests, and at the black base of which silly rock bass lay waiting for worms and hooks; the place further up where the river grew sharply narrow, and deep dark water sped swiftly under an ancient jam of rotting logs, and where by creeping cautiously through the alders, and gaining a foothold on the birch which was the key to the obstructing pile, there were pike to be had for the throwing, and sometimes exciting struggles with angry black bass, who made the pole bend like a whip, and had an evil trick of cutting the line back under the logs; and then the broader stretch of water below the ruined paper mill's dam, where the wading in the thigh-deep rifts was so pleasant, and where the white fish would bite in the swift water almost as gamely as trout, if one had only the knack of playing his line rightly in the eddies.

A score of these spots Seth had known and loved from the boyhood of twine and pin hooks; they seemed almost sacredly familiar now, as he wandered up and down the stream, dividing his atten-

tion between the lures and wiles of the angler's art and musings on the vast change of scene which was so close before him. Ah, how fair were the day dreams he had idly, fondly built for himself here in these old haunts, with kingfishers and water rats for sympathizers, and the ceaseless murmur of the water, the buzz of the locusts in the sun, the croak of the frogs among the reeds, for a soft inspiring chorus of accompaniment to his thoughts!

Now these dreams were really to come true; he was actually going to the city, to wear decent clothes, to mingle as much as he chose with men of wisdom and refinement, to attain that one aim and vision of his life, a place on a great paper!

It was only here by the river, rod in hand, that he seemed able to fully realize the beatitude of the vista. So as often as he could he came, and if there was a ground note of sorrow at leaving these nooks, this dear old river, there was also a triumphant song of exaltation in the air, the water, the sunshine, which he could not hear on the farm.

Partly because these excursions generally led him from the house before she made her appearance mornings, partly because he felt vaguely that his own victory over fate involved disappointment for her, Seth did not see much of Isabel during her husband's absence. So far as he knew, she had taken the news of Albert's determination to move into the country quietly enough. Neither by word or sign had she discovered to Seth any distaste for the prospect. But none the less he had a half-guilty

conviction that she did not like it, and that she must blame him, or at least have some feeling against him, for it. She had spoken so earnestly to him about the curse of existence in the country; it was not conceivable to him that she should suddenly accept for herself without protests or repining, the very life she had thus commiserated with him about.

Yet it seemed after all that he was mistaken. It was the evening after Albert's return, and Annie had come over after supper, ostensibly to borrow a wrapper-pattern from Isabel, but really, it need not be doubted, to hear the news.

What news there was to be given out the eldest brother dispensed to the family circle, after Alvira had cleared away the "tea-things."

That domestic had a clear idea of making one in the circle, and, hastening in from the kitchen without her apron, drew up a chair to sit with the others, and enjoy the revelations which, from Albert's manner during supper, all felt to be impending. But the invasion of city manners, which she and Milton had deplored and ridiculed for a fortnight back, had an unsuspected bitterness in its train for her. The lawyer looked at her coolly, as he struck a match on the under side of the mantel-piece, and asked: "Hadn't you better go out, Alvira, and see that the chickens don't get into the kitchen?"—and she flounced out again, with nose in air, and black eyes flashing.

Albert lighted his cigar, put an arm chair down

near the old rocker in which his father sat and took his seat. Near the open door, overlooking the farmyard and the barns, and full in the light from the west, sat Miss Sabrina, knitting; and Isabel, with a paper. At the latter's feet, on a hassock, was Annie, and Seth sat on the doorstep.

"Father," said Albert, "things have been arranged in New York so that I can speak, now, about the plans which I hinted of ten days ago."

The old man nodded his head, and said plaintively, "Whatever yew think best, Albert, s'long as the boys git a fair shaow."

"You needn't worry about that. My business is settled now, I think, so that I can live here six or eight months in the year, say from March till October, running down occasionally, perhaps, but making this my residence. I will take up all the mortgages—perhaps buy back some of the old farm, may be all of it. There are three or four ways in which this can be equitably arranged—we'll talk of those in detail later on, some day when John can come up. I will have the carpenters here in a few days, to look over the house, and figure on putting it in first-class repair. The barns will have to be new throughout. There must be new machinery, new fences, and a pretty thorough weeding out of the cattle. We shall want a carriage house—but then its no use of enumerating, there is so much to be done. We will put some money into horseflesh down on Long Island, and see if something can't be done in the way of a stock-farm. I'm thinking of a trout

pond, up beyond the orchard, in the ravine there, too."

"Oh, Albert, this is what I've be'n prayin' for this thirty year!" It was Sabrina who spoke. There were tears of joy in her eyes.

Lemuel Fairchild seemed rather dazed, not to say dismayed, at the prospect thus bewilderingly unfolded. "It'll cost a heap o' money, Albert," he said at last, rather dubiously, "an' I dunnao' 'baout yer gittin' it back agin."

"That will be *my* look out," said the lawyer, confidently. "At any rate, Isabel and I will make a good home for you and Aunt Sabrina, as long as you both live. It will be a pleasant change for us both. As for Seth—"

There was a pause, and Annie nestled closer to Isabel, with a soft "Oh yes, about Seth."

"As for Seth, it's time he saw something of life besides grubbing here like a farm-hand. We will try and get along without him here. I've talked the matter over with a friend of mine, the proprietor of the *Tecumseh Chronicle* and he is willing to give him a start there, under the most favorable conditions. The salary will be small at first, of course, but I will supplement it with enough to give him a decent living, if he is frugal. After that of course it all depends on himself."

Seth stood up, as these last words were spoken, and replied, stammeringly. "You needn't be afraid of my not trying hard, Albert. I'm sure I'm very grateful to you. It's more than I dared expect you

would do for me." He pushed his way past the women to shake hands with his brother, and say again "It's so good of you."

Albert received these expressions of gratitude benevolently, adding some words of advice, and concluding with "You had better get ready to start as early next week as you can. One of the *Chronicle* men is going on a vacation, and its Workman's idea that you would be handy in his absence. You could go, say, Wednesday, couldn't you?"

"So far as getting ready is concerned, I don't know that there is anything to do which couldn't be done in a day. But—but—"

"Of course you will need some things. I'll talk with you about that in the morning. We'll drive down to Thessaly day after to-morrow together."

Albert rose with this to go out and see Milton, and the family interview was at an end.

Miss Sabrina hurried out to the kitchen, impatient to begin discussing with Alvira, as had been her wont for years, this new development in the affairs of the household.

CHAPTER IX.

AT "M'TILDY'S" BEDSIDE.

LEMUEL FAIRCHILD sat still, smoking his wooden pipe, and looking absently, straight ahead, into the papered wall. This habit of gazing at nothing was familiar to them all, and when, at Isabel's suggestion, the three young people started for a stroll through the orchard path, they left him entirely without ceremony. This was growing to be the rule; no one in the family now consulted him, or took the trouble to be polite to him. He seemed to have become in his own house merely an article of animated furniture, of not much more importance than the rough-furred sickly old cat who dozed his life away back of the stove.

He sat thus in solitude for some time, blankly studying the grotesque patterns in the old-fashioned wall-paper, and drawing mechanically at the pipe in his mouth, unconscious that no smoke came. Thus Miss Sabrina found him when, after a more than ordinarily sharp passage at arms with Alvira, she returned from the Kitchen.

"I swaow! thet girl gits wuss tempered 'n' more presumin' ev'ry day o' her life," she exclaimed.

"Who—Annie?" asked her brother, rousing himself as if from a nap.

"Annie! nao! who's talkin' abaout *her*?"

"Oh nothin', unly I was thinkin' 'baout Annie—'baout her 'n' Seth, yeh knaow," answered Lemuel, apologetically.

"Well, what abaout 'em?" The query was distinctly aggressive in tone.

"Oh, nothin' much. I was sort o' thinkin'—well, *you* knaow S'briny, haow Sissly used to lot on their makin' a match of it—'n' I was kine o' wond'rin' ef this here notion o' Seth's goin' away wouldn't knock it all in th' head."

"Well?" Miss Sabrina's monosyllabic comment had so little of sympathy or acquiescence in it, that Lemuel continued in an injured tone and with more animation, not to say resolution:

"Well, I've hed kine of an idea o' goin' over 'n' talkin' it over with M'tildy. Mebbe that'll be the best thing to dew."

"Oh *you* think so, dew yeh? Thet's all th' pride *you've* got lef', is it? I think I see *myself* goin' hangin' raound Matildy Warren, beggin' her to let her granddaughter marry a Fairchild! I'm ashamed of yeh, Lemuel."

"I don' see, much, what ther' is to be ashamed on." He added, with the faintest shadow of a grin on his face. "'N' b'twixt you 'n' me, I don't see 's there's so blamed much fur me to be praoud abaout, nuther. 'Tain't 's if I was goin' to ask a favor o' M'tildy, at all. She 'n' Sissly used to talk 'baout the thing 's if 'twas settled. 'N' now 't she's gone, 'n' Seth's talkin' o' quittin' th' farm, seems to

me it'd be the sensible thing to kind o' fine aout of M'tildy wouldn't offer th' young folks her farm, ef they'd stay."

"*Very* well, sir. Hev' yer own way," answered Miss Sabrina, with stern formality. "You allus *would* hev yer own way—and yeh kin go muddle things up to yer heart's content, for all o' me!"

Lemuel watched his sister march to the stairs door and close it decisively behind her. He was accustomed of old to this proof of her wrath; as far back as he could remember it had been Sabrina's habit to figuratively wash her hands of unpleasant complications on the ground-floor by slamming this self-same door, and going up to sulk in her own room. She did it as a young girl, in the first months of her disagreements with his young wife; it seemed to him a most natural proceeding now, when they were both old, gray-headed people.

Just now, it was a relief to him that she had gone, for if she had stayed he might not have had the courage to put his thoughts into actions. As it was he took his hat from its nail back of the kitchen door, and started across-lots for the Warren homestead.

There was no danger of not finding Mrs. Warren at home. For seven or eight years she had scarcely stirred beyond her own door, and for the past eighteen months she had been bed-ridden. The front door was opened to Mr. Fairchild by a young slip of a girl, one of the brood of daughters with

which a neighboring poor family was weighted down, and all of whom had been driven to seek work at any price among the farmers of the vicinity. It seemed as if there was a Lawton girl in every other farmhouse the whole length of the Burfield road.

The girl ushered him into the gloomy hall, gloomier than ever now in the gathering twilight, and unceremoniously left him there, while she went to announce his presence. He heard through a door ajar at the end of the hall a thin, querulous voice ask, "Which one of the Fairchilds is it?" and the girl's reply "The old man."

Then the servant returned to him and with a curt "Come ahead," led him to the mistress of the house, who lay in her bed-home, in a recess off the living room.

Mrs. Matilda Warren had never been what might be called a popular woman in the neighborhood. She and her husband, the latter dead now for many years, had come from Massachusetts. They were educated people in a sense, and had not mingled easily with their rougher neighbors. The widow Warren had, after her daughter's escapade, carried this exclusiveness to a point which the neighborhood found disagreeable. Gradually she had grown into the recluse habit, and younger generations on the hillside, eking out the gossip of their elders with fancies of their own, born of stray glimpses of her tall, gaunt figure and pale face, came to regard her with much that same awe which, two centuries before, reputed witches had for children, young and old.

Something of this feeling Lemuel himself was conscious of, as he stood before her. The coverlet came up close under her arms. She wore a wrapper-dress of red flannel. As he entered she raised herself, with an evidently cruel effort, upon her elbow, dragging the pillow down to aid in supporting her shoulder. She panted with this exertion as she confronted him. Her scanty white hair was combed tightly back from her forehead, and bound in place with a black-velvet band; a natural parting on the side of the hair gave the withered face a suggestion of juvenile jauntiness, in grotesque, jarring contrast with the pale blue eyes which glittered from caverns of dark wrinkles, and the sunken, distorted mouth. She had changed so vastly since their last meeting that Lemuel stood bewildered and silent, staring at her.

She spoke first. "I'm trying to think—it must be twenty year since we've met, Lemuel Fairchild."

"Nigh onto that, M'tildy," he replied, turning his hat in his hands.

"I didn't expect ever to lay eyes on you again, I couldn't come to you, and wouldn't if I could, and I didn't dream you would ever show your face here." The aged woman said this in a high, sharp voice, speaking rapidly and with an ungracious tone.

Lemuel fidgetted with his hat and moved his feet uneasily on the dog-skin rug. "Yeh needn't be afeered, M'tildy, I wouldn't hev come naow ef it hadn't been somethin' partikler 'baout Annie."

The invalid raised her shoulder from the pillow

with a sudden movement, and bent her head forward. "What's happened to her? Is she hurt? Tell me, quick!"

"Oh nao, they ain't nothin' th' matter with her. It's unly 'baout her 'n' Seth. I kine o' thought we ought to talk it over 'n' see haow the land lay. That's all."

"Oh that's it, is it? *Samantha!*"

Betrayed out of her shrewdness by the suddenness of the summons the servant girl made her immediate appearance through the hall door.

"Yes, I knew you were listening, you huzzy," said Mrs. Warren grimly. "You get along up stairs, go into Annie's room, an' make a noise of some sort on the melodeon till I call you. Not too much noise, mind; jest enough so I can know you're up there."

As the girl left the room, the invalid explained: "What she don't hear, the rest of the Lawtons won't know. That family's as good as a detective force for the whole county." Then, in a less amiable tone: "You might as well set down. What is it about my girl an' Seth?"

As Lemuel awkwardly seated himself near the bedside and prepared to answer, a wailing, discordant series of sounds came from the floor above. The knowledge that the girl was creating this melancholy noise to order, and on his account, confused his thought and he found himself stating the case much more baldly than he had intended. "The fact is," he said, stroking his hat over his knee, "Seth's thinkin' o' goin' away to Tecumsey—Albert's got him a place

there—'n' so I s'pose it'll be all up b'twixt him 'n' Annie."

The grandmother never took those light, searching eyes off her visitor's face. He felt himself turning uncomfortably red under their malevolent gaze, and wished she would speak. But she said nothing. At last he explained, deferentially :

"I thought it'd only be right to tell yeh. I know Sissy 'n' you use to talk abaout th' thing. Th' way she useto talk, speshly jis' 'fore she died, it 'peared 's if you tew hed it all settled. But Albert's goin' to take th' farm, it seems, 'n' Seth, he's fig'rin' on goin' away to be a neditor, 'n' it looks to me 's if th' hull plan'd fell threw."

Still no reply from the bed. He added, helplessly "Don't it kind o' seem so to you, M'tildy?"

The wretched discords from the chamber above mocked him. The witch-like eyes from the shadows of the recess began to burn him. It was growing into the dusk, but the eyes had a light of their own, a cold, steely, fierce light. Would she never speak? How he regretted having come!

"I'll tell you what seems to me, Lemuel Fairchild," she said at last, not speaking so rapidly now, and putting a sharp, finishing edge on each of her words. "It seems to me that there's never been but one decent, honorable, likely human bein' in your whole family an' she came into it by the mistake of marrying you. I blame myself for not remembering the blood that was in you all, an' for thinking that this youngest son of yours was different from the

rest. I forgot that he was a Fairchild like the others, an' I forgot what I owed that family of men, so mean and cowardly and selfish that they have to watch each other like so many hyenas. An' so you've come to tell me that Seth has turned out like his father, like his uncle, like all of his name, eh? The more fool I, to need to be told it!"

Lemuel's impulse was to rise from his chair, and bear himself with offended dignity, but the glitter in the old woman's eyes warned him that the attempt would be a failure. He scowled, put his hat on the other knee, crossed his legs, pretended to be interested in the antics of a kitten which was working havoc with a ball of yarn at his feet. Finally he said:

"You ain't fair to Seth. He's a good boy. He ain't said nothin' nor done nothin' fer yeh to git mad at. Fer that matter, you never was fair to any of us, 'cept Sissly."

"Fair! *Fair!*" came the answer promptly, and in a swifter measure. "Hear the man! Why, Lemuel Fairchild, you know that you cheated your own brother out of the share in that farm that was his by all rights as much as yours. You *know* that your father intended you both to share alike, that he died too suddenly to make a new will and that you grabbed everything under a will made when your brother William was thought to be too sickly to ever raise. You *know* that you let him grow up an idle, worthless coot of a fellow, an' then encouraged him—yes, don't deny it, encouraged him I say—to make a fool of my daughter, and run away with her.

You knew I wouldn't look at him as a suitor for Jenny; but you thought I would be soft enough, once they were married, to give him my farm, an' you counted on getting it away from him afterwards, just as your father got the Kennard farm before you. You egged him on into the trouble, an' you let him die in it, without help. Oh I know you, Lemuel Fairchild—I know your breed!

“Your *wife* was a good woman—a million times better than you deserved. *She* knew the wrongs that had been done me, an' Annie, an' her poor ne'er-dowell of a father before her; *she* was anxious to make them good, not I. It was she who talked, year after year, when she ran over here on the sly to visit me, of squaring everything by the young folk's marriage. For a long time I didn't like it. I distrusted the family, as, God knows, I had reason to. But all that I heard of Seth was in his favor. He was hard-working, patient, even-tempered, so everyone said. What little I saw of him I liked. An' I felt sorry for him, too, knowing how dear he was to his mother, and yet how helpless she was to give him advantages, an' make something besides a farm-drudge out of him. So little by little, I gave in to the idea, an' finally it became mine almost as much as Cecily's.

“As for Annie, I don't know how much she has grown to care for him; I'm afraid she's known about our talks, and lotted on 'em, though if anything has passed between them she would have told me. For she's a good girl—a *good* girl—and she'll stand by me,

never fear, and say as I say now, that it's good riddance! D'ye mind? Good riddance to bad rubbish—to your whole miserable, conniving, underhanded family! There ain't an honest hair in your head, Lemuel Fairchild, and there never was. And you can go back to them that sent you, to your old catamaran of a sister and your young sneak of a son, and tell 'em what I think of them, and you, and the whole caboodle of you, that ruined and killed my Jane, and made me a broken old woman before my time, and now tries to break my grand-daughter's heart! And the longest day you live, don't ever let me lay eyes on you again. That's all!"

Lemuel groped his way out again through the dark hall, to the front door. The groaning discords from upstairs rose to a triumphant babel of sound as he knocked against the hat-rack, and fumbled for the latch, as if to emphasize and gloat over his discomfiture. The cold evening air, after the sweltering heat of the sick-room, was a physical relief, but it brought no moral comfort.

Old Lemuel was much pained, and even more confused, by the hard words to which he had had to listen. They presented a portrait of himself which he felt to be in no way a likeness, yet he could not say wherein a single line should be altered. He knew that he was not a bad man; he felt conscious of having done no special wrong, intentionally, to anybody; he had always tried to be fair and square and easy-going with everybody: yet the mischief of it was that all these evil things which the witch-

like M'tildy had piled at his door were of indubitable substance, and he could not prove, even to himself, much less to her, that they did not belong there. It was a part of the consistently vile luck of his life that all these malignant happenings should be charged up against him, and used to demonstrate his wickedness. He had not enough mental skill or alertness to sift the unfair from the true in the indictment she had drawn, or to put himself logically in her place, and thus trace her mistakes. He only realized that all these events which she enumerated had served to convince Mrs. Warren that he was a villain. The idea was a new one to him, and it both surprised and troubled him to find that, as he thought the matter over he could not see where she was particularly wrong. Yet a villain he had certainly never intended to be—never for a moment. Was this not cruelly hard luck?

And then there was this business about Seth. He had meant it all in the friendliest spirit, all with the best of motives. And how she had snapped him up before he had a chance to explain, and called him a scoundrel and his boy a sneak, and driven him from the house! Here was a muddle for one—and Sabrina had said he would make a muddle of it, as he had of everything else, all through his life. The lonely, puzzled, discouraged old man felt wofully like shedding tears, as he approached his own gate—or no, it was Albert's gate now—and passed the young people chatting there, and realized what a feeble old fool they all must think him.

CHAPTER X.

THE FISHING PARTY.

THE young people were arranging, as Lemuel slunk past them in the dark, a fishing party for the following day. The proposal had been Isabel's—she had a fertile mind for pleasure planning—and Annie and Seth were delighted with it. They would take a basket of food, and make the tea over a fire in the woods, and the two women could take turns in playing at fishing with a little rod which Seth had made for himself as a boy. It would be an ideal way of bidding good-bye to Seth, said his pretty sister-in-law, and Annie, feeling more deeply both the significance of saying good-bye and the charm of having a whole day to herself along the river and in his company, had assented eagerly.

As for Seth, this sudden accession of feminine interest in, and concern for, him was extremely pleasant and grateful. The very suggestion of the trip, in his honor, was like a sweet taken in advance from the honeyed future which he was so soon to realize. Long that night, after he had walked over to the Warren gate with Annie, and returned to the unlathed attic where Milton lay already snoring, he thought fondly of the morrow's treat.

The morning came, warm but overcast, with a

soft tendency of air from the west. "It couldn't have been better if it had been made to order," Seth said enthusiastically, when Isabel made her appearance before breakfast. "It will be good fishing and good walking, not too hot and not wet."

Albert smiled a trifle satirically when the project was unfolded to him—with that conceited tolerance which people who don't fish always extend to those who do. "You'll probably get wet and have the toothache" he said to his wife, but offered no objection.

The lunch was packed, the poles were ready, the bait-can stood outside the shed door, breakfast was a thing of the past, and Isabel sat with her sunhat and parasol—but Annie did not come. Seth fidgeted and fumed as a half-hour went by, then the hour itself. It was so unlike Annie to be late. He made an errand to the hay-barn, to render the waiting less tedious, and it was there that Milton found him, rummaging among some old harness for a strap.

"Annie's come over," said Milton, "I heerd her say somethin' 'baout not goin' fishin', after all. Looks 'sif she'd be'n cryin' tew. I tole 'em I'd fetch yeh."

Seth came out into the light, slapping the dust off his hands. "What's that you say? Why isn't she going?"

"I dunnao nothin' more 'n I've told yeh. Ask her yerself. I 'spose she's be'n cryin' at the thought of yer goin'. That'll be the cend o' ev'rythin' atwixt you two, won't it?"

“Oh, do mind your own business, Milton!” Seth said, and hurried across the barnyard to where the two young women stood, on the doorstep. “Why aren’t you going, Annie? What’s the matter?” he called out as he approached.

Poor Annie looked the picture of despair. Her face bore the marks of recent tears and she hung her head in silence. Isabel answered for her.

“Going? Of course she is going. It would be ridiculous not to go, now that everything’s arranged. Get the things together, Seth, and let us make a start.”

“But Milton said she wasn’t going,” persisted Seth.

“Dear, dear, how downright you are! Don’t I tell you that she *is* going, that there is nothing the matter, that we are waiting for you?” And there was nothing more to be said.

The sun came out before the trio had gone far, but not before they had begun to forget the cloud at the start. The grass in the pastures was not quite dry yet, but wet feet were a part of the fun of the thing, Isabel said gaily. The meadow larks careened in the air about them, and the bobolinks, swinging on the thistle tops, burst into chorus from every side as the sunlight spread over the hill-side. There were robins, too, in the juniper trees beyond the white-flowering buckwheat patch, Seth pointed out, too greedy to wait till the green berries ripened. A flock of crows rose from the buckwheat as they passed and who could help smiling at Isabel’s citi-

fied imitation of their strident hawing? They came upon some strawberries, half-hidden in the tall grass beside the rail-topped wall, and Isabel would gather them in her handkerchief, to serve as dessert in their coming *al fresco* dinner, and Annie helped her, smiling in spite of herself at the city lady's extravagant raptures.

When they stopped to rest, in the fresh-scented shadow of the woods, and sat on a log along the path, two wee chipmunks came out from the brake opposite and began a chirping altercation, so comical in its suggestions of human wrangling that they all laughed outright. The sound scared away the tiny rodents in a twinkling, and it banished as swiftly the restraint under which the excursion had begun.

From that moment it was all gayety, jesting, enjoyment. Isabel was the life of the party; she said the drollest things;—passed the quaintest comments,—revealed such an inexhaustable store of spirits that she lifted her companions fairly out of their serious selves. Seth found himself talking easily, freely, and even Annie now and again made little jokes, at which they all laughed merrily.

The fisherman's judgment as to the day was honored in full measure. The fish had never bitten more sharply, the eddies had never carried the line better. It seemed so easy, to let the line wander back and forth between the two currents, to tell when the bait was grabbed underneath, and to haul out the plunging, flapping beauty, that Isabel was

all eagerness to try it, and Seth rigged the little pole for her, baited the hook self-sacrificingly with his biggest worm, which he had thought of in connection with a certain sapient father of all pike further up the river, and showed her where and how to cast the line.

Alas, it was not so simple, after all, this catching of fish.

First she lost a hook on a root; then it seemed to her that ages passed in which nothing whatever happened and this was followed by the discovery that her hook had entirely been stripped of bait without her suspecting it. At last there came a bite, a deep, determined tug, which she answered with a hysterical pull, hurling through the air and into the thistles far back of her a wretched little bull-head which they were unable to find for a long time, and which miserably stung her thumb with its fin when she finally did find it.

After this exploit Annie must try, and she promptly twitched her line into the tree overhead. And so the day went forward, with light-hearted laughter and merriment, with the perfect happiness which the sunshine and color and perfume of June can bring alone to the young.

They grew a trifle more serious at dinner time. It was in the narrow defile where the great jam of logs was, and where the river went down, black and deep, under the rotting wood with a vicious gurgle. Just above the jam there was a mound, velvety now with new grass, and comfortably shaded—a notable spot

for dinner and a long rest, and then the girls could watch to much advantage Seth's fishing from the logs, of which great things were prophesied. Here then the cloth was spread on the grass, the water put on over a fire lighted back of the mound, and the contents of the basket laid in prandial array. It was in truth a meagre dinner, but were appetites ever keener or less critical?

Once during the forenoon, when allusion was made to Seth's coming departure, Isabel had commanded that nothing be said on that subject all day long. "Let us not think of it at all," she had said, "but just enjoy the hours as if they would never end. That is the only secret of happiness." But now she herself traversed the forbidden line.

"How strange it will all seem to you, Seth," she mused, as she poured out the tea. "As the time draws near, don't you almost dread it?"

"What I've been thinking most about to-day is your coming to the farm to live. It can't be that you are altogether pleased—after what I've heard you say."

"Oh yes, why not?" said Isabel. "My case is very different from yours. I shall be just as idle as I like. I shall have horses, you know and a big conservatory, and a piano, and all that. We shall have lots of people here all summer long—just think what fishing parties we can make up!—and whenever it gets stupid we can run down to New York. Oh, I've got quite beyond the reconciled stage now. I am almost enthusiastic over it. When you come

back in a year's time, you won't know the place. It will have been transformed into a centre of fashion and social display. I may get to have a veritable salon, you know, the envy and despair of all Dearborn County. Fancy Elhanan Pratt and Sile Thomas in evening dress, with patent leather pumps and black stockings, scowling at Leander Crump, with a crushed hat under his arm, whom they suspect of watering his milk! Oh, we shall be gay, I assure you."

Seth looked at her attentively, puzzled to know how much of this was badinage, how much sincerity. She smiled archly at him—what a remarkably winning smile she had!—and continued:

"Then Annie will be company for me, too. I mean to bring her out, you know, and make her a leader of society. In a year's time when you come back and I introduce you to her, you won't be able to credit your senses, her air will be so *distingué*, and her tastes so fastidious."

She ceased her gay chatter abruptly, for Annie had turned away and they could see that her eyes were filling with tears.

Seth bethought him of those earlier tears, the signs of which had been so obvious when they started, and it was natural enough to connect the two.

"Something *has* happened, Annie," he said. "Can't you tell us what it is?"

And then he bit his tongue at having made the speech, for Annie turned a beseeching look at him, then at Isabel, and burst into sobs.

“Isn't it reason enough that you are going away?” said Isabel. “What more could you ask?”

“No, it isn't that alone,” protested Annie through her tears. Her pride would not brook the assumption. “There is something else; I can hardly tell you — but — but — my grandmother has suddenly taken a great dislike to Seth; if she knew where I was she would be very angry; I never deceived her, even indirectly, before, but I couldn't bear not to come after I got to the house, and if I've done wrong—”

“Now, now dear” cooed Isabel, leaning over to take Annie's hands, “what nonsense to talk of wrong; come now, dry your eyes, and smile at us, like a good girl. You are nervous and tired out with the task of tending your grandmother—that's all—and this day in the woods will do you a world of good. Don't let us have even the least little bit of unhappiness in it.”

Seth watched his sister-in-law caress and coax away Annie's passing fit of gloom, with deep enjoyment. The tenderness and beauty of the process were a revelation to him; it was an attribute of womanhood the existence of which he had scarcely suspected heretofore, in his untutored, bucolic state. Annie seemed to forget her grief quickly enough, and became cheerful again; in quaint docility she smiled through her tears at Isabel's command, and the latter was well within the truth when she cried:

“There! You have never looked prettier in your life!”

Seth nodded acquiescence, and returned the smile. But somehow this grief of Annie's had bored him, and he felt rather than thought that his country cousin, even in this radiant moment, was of slight interest compared with the city sister-in-law, who not only knew enough not to cry herself, but could so sweetly charm away tears from others.

Seth tested all the joints of his pole, and changed the hook and baited it with studious care, before he climbed out on the jam. Gingerly feeling his way from log to log, he got at last upon the wet mossy birch which projected like a ledge at the bottom of the pile. The women watched his progress from the mound, and gave a little concerted shout of triumph when, at the very first cast of his line into the froth of the dark eddy, it was caught and dragged swiftly across the stream, and a handsome pike a moment later paid the penalty.

"That's by far the biggest yet, isn't it?" Annie asked.

"Wait, there are bigger yet. Watch this!"

The line, thrown in again, had been sharply jerked and was now being drawn upstream under the logs. Seth moved down to the end of the birch, stooping under the jutting heap of logs above, to be able to play the pole sidewise, and save the fish. It was a difficult position to stand in; he held the rod far forward with one hand, and grasped a bough above for support as he leaned out over the stream.

The thing snapped—exactly how it was no one knew—a log released from its bondage shifted posi-

tion, a dozen others rolled over it rumbling, and the women held their breath affrighted as they saw, without moving, the whole top of the jam tremble, lift a jagged end or two, and then collapse with a hollow noise. As they found voice to scream, the water was covered with floating debris, and the air filled with a musty fungus-like smell.

There was no sign of Seth.

The roar of the falling timber had scarcely died away before Annie had left the mound, had torn her way through the alders at the bottom, and stood panting on the wet slimy rocks at the edge of the stream. She hardly heard the frightened warning which Isabel, pale and half-fainting, called out to her :

“Keep away from the water, Annie! You'll surely be drowned!”

She was painfully intent upon another thing, upon the search for some indication of her cousin. The logs were moving but slowly in the current, and were heaped so irregularly that no clear survey of the whole surface could be had. There seemed an eternity of suffering in every second which she spent thus, scanning the scene. Could the crush of logs have killed him? Even if he had escaped that, would he not be drowned by this time? The grinding of the logs against each other, the swash of the water at her feet, Isabel's faint moaning on the mound above, seemed to her dazed terror a sort of death dirge.

Oh, joy! She caught sight of something in cloth between two great tree-trunks, drenched, covered

with the red grime of rotten wood, motionless ; but it was Seth. His face she could not see, nor whether it was under water or not. She walked boldly into the stream—kneedeep at the outset, and the slippery rocks shelving off swiftly into unknown brown-black depths—but there was no hesitation. A half-dozen steps, and she disappeared suddenly beneath the water. Isabel wrung her hands in despair, too deep now to find a voice ; but Annie had only slipped on the treacherous slates, and found her footing again. The water came to her shoulders now, and was growing deeper steadily.

With a strength born of desperation she clambered up on the birch, which floated nearest her, and pulled herself along its length, swaying as it rolled in the current under her weight, but managing to keep on top. It was nothing short of miraculous to Isabel's eyes, the manner in which she balanced herself, clambered from log to log, overcame all the obstacles which lay between her and the inanimate form at the other side. The distance was not great, and a swimmer would have made nothing of the feat, but for a girl encumbered with heavy wet skirts, and in deep water for the first time, it was a real achievement.

At last she reached Seth—her progress had covered three minutes, and seemed to her hours long—and, throwing herself across both logs, with a final effort lifted his head upon her shoulder.

“ He is alive ! ” she said to Isabel, feebly now, but with a great sigh of relief.

The city woman ran down at this, all exultation. At Annie's suggestion, she tied their two shawls together, fastened one end to a pole, and managed to fling the other over to the rescuer; it was easy work after that to draw the logs to the bank, and then Annie, standing knee-deep again in the water, made shift to get the heavy dead weight safe on land. The two women tugged their burden through the alders, and up to the place where the dinner dishes still lay, with scarcely a word. Then exhausted, excited, overjoyed, Isabel threw herself in Annie's arms and they both found relief in tears.

Seth had been struck on the head and stunned by the first falling log; how much he had been in the water or how near he had been to drowning could not be discovered.

He presently opened his eyes, and a smile came almost instantaneously to his face as he realised that his head was resting in Isabel's lap, that he was muffled up in her shawl, and that she was looking down upon him anxiously, tenderly. A second sufficed to bring the whole thing to his mind, or at least the facts that he had gone under with the logs and by some agency had been landed here safe and comfortable, if not dry—and to bring also the instinctive idea that it would be the intelligent part to lie still, and be petted and sympathised with.

Isabel scarcely returned his smile. She had not recovered from her fright.

"Oh, Seth," she asked earnestly, "Are you hurt? Do you feel any pain?"

“Not a bit” he replied—“only dizzy like. By George! How they did come down though. I must have had a pretty narrow squeak of it. Funny—I don’t remember coming out at all.”

She smiled now. “I should think not. You lay perfectly senseless way out there among the logs. We fished you out, and dragged you up here. I feel like a heroine in a Crusader’s romance, really!”

It entered Seth’s mind to say something nice in reply, that she looked like one, or that they were not equal in those benighted ages to producing such women, or something of that sort; but his tongue did not seem to frame the words easily and as he looked up at her he grew shy once again, and felt himself flushing under her smile, and only said vacuously, “Mightly lucky I wasn’t alone, isn’t it?”

Annie appeared on the scene now, her clothes steaming from the heat of the fire, over which she had endeavoured to dry them, and her teeth displaying a spasmodic tendency to knock together between sentences. She too was full of solicitude as to Seth’s condition, and to satisfy this he reluctantly sat up, stretched his arms out, felt of the bump on his forehead, beat his chest, and finally stood erect.

“I’m all right, you see” he said—“only, bo-o-o, I’m cold,” and he made for the fire, upon which Annie had heaped brushwood, which crackled and snapped now, giving forth a furious heat.

They stood about the fire for a considerable time. Isabel was opposite Seth, rather ostentatiously drying sundry damp places in her dress which had come

in contact with the rescued man's dripping hair and clothes. He was so interested in watching her, and in thinking half-regretfully, half-jubilantly, that she had been put to this discomfort in saving his life, that he failed to notice how completely drenched his cousin had been. The conversation turned entirely, of course, upon the recent great event, but it was desultory and broken by long intervals of silence, and somehow Seth did not get any clear idea of how he was saved, much less of the parts the two women had respectively played in the rescue.

It would be unfair to say that Isabel purposely misrepresented anything; it is nearer the truth to describe her as confounding her own anxiety with her companion's action. At all events, the narrative to be gleaned from her scattering descriptions and exclamations had the effect of creating in Seth's mind the impression that he could never be sufficiently grateful to his sister-in-law.

As for Annie, the whole momentous episode had come so swiftly, had been so imperative, exhaustive in its demands of all her faculties, and then had so suddenly dwindled to the unromantic conditions of drying wet clothes at a brush fire, that her thoughts upon it were extremely confused. She scarcely took part in the conversation. Perhaps she felt vaguely that her own share in the thing was not made to stand forth with all the prominence it deserved, but she took it for granted that, in his first waking moments, while he was alone with Isa-

bel, Seth had been told the central fact of her going into the water for him, and, if he was not effusively grateful, why—it was not Seth's way to be demonstrative. Besides she said to herself, she did not want to be thanked.

Still, late that night, long hours after Seth had said good-night to her at the Warren gate, and she had almost guiltily stolen up to her room without braving her grandmother's questions, Annie could not go to sleep for thinking:—

“He might at least have *looked* some thanks, even if he did not speak them.”

Three days later, Seth departed for the city. It was not a particularly impressive ceremony, this leave-taking, not half so much as he had imagined it would be.

He had risen early, dressed himself in one of the two new, ready-made, cheap suits Albert had bought for him at Thessaly and packed all his possessions in the carpet satchel which had been in the family he knew not how long—and still found, when he descended the stairs, that he was the first down. It was a dark, rainy morning, and the living room looked unspeakably desolate, and felt disagreeably cold. He sat for a long time by a window pondering the last copy of John's *Banner*, and trying to thus prepare his mind for that immense ordeal of daily newspaper work, that struggle of unknown, titanic proportions, now close before him.

Alvira at last came in to lay the breakfast table.

"Hello, you up already?" was all she said; but he felt she was eyeing him furtively, as if even thus soon he was a stranger in the house of his birth.

Aunt Sabrina next appeared. "There! I knew it 'd rain," she exclaimed. "I told Alviry so last night. When th' cords on th' curtains git limp, yeh can't fool me 'baout it's not rainin'. 'N' Seth, I hope you'll go to Church regular whatever else you dew. 'N' ef yeh could take a class in th' Sunday schewl, it 'd go a long ways tow'rd' keepin' yeh aout o' temptation. Will yeh go to th' Baptist Church, think? Th' Fairchilds 'v' allus be'n Baptists."

The breakfast passed in constrained silence, save for Albert, who delivered a monologue on the evils of city life, and the political and ethical debauchery of the press, to which Seth tried dutifully to pay attention—thinking all the while how to say good-bye to Isabel, how to invest his words with a fervor the others would not suspect.

When the time came, all this planning proved of no avail. He found himself shaking hands as perfunctorily with her as with her husband, and his father and aunt. Only the latter kissed him, and she did it with awkward formality.

Then he climbed into the buggy where Milton and the carpet bag were already installed, and, answering in kind a chorus of "Good-byes" drove out into the rain—and the World.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE WORLD.

SETH'S first impressions of the World, gathered when he found himself and his valise alone on the sidewalk of one of Tecumseh's chief streets, were distinctly gloomy.

Other passengers who had left the train here, and in whose throng he had been borne along thus far, started off briskly in various directions once they reached the busy thoroughfare, elbowing their way through the horde of clamorous hotel porters much as one might push through a clump of obstructing bushes. He had firmly fixed in his mind the cardinal rule of traveling countrymen, that these shouting runners were brigands intent upon robbing him, and he was clear in his resolution to give them no hold upon him, not even by so much as a civil expression of countenance. He said "No, thank you!" sternly to at least a dozen solicitations, so it seemed to him, and walked away steadily, fearful that their practised eyes had detected in him an utter stranger, and intent only upon proving to them that he knew where he was going. When at last it seemed likely that they were no longer watching him, he stopped, put his bag down in a door way, and looked about.

It was half-past six of a summer afternoon (for a failure to make connections had prolonged the sixty-mile journey over eight hours), and the sun, still high, beat down the whole length of the street with an oppressive glare and heat. The buildings on both sides, as far as eye could reach, were of brick, flat-topped, irregular in height, and covered with flaring signs. There was no tree, nor any green thing, in sight.

Past him in a ceaseless stream, and all in one direction, moved a swarm of humanity—laborers and artisans with dinner-pails, sprucely dressed narrow-chested clerks and book-keepers, and bold faced factory-girls in dowdy clothes and boots run down at the heels—a bewildering, chattering procession. No one of all this throng glanced at him, or paid the slightest attention to him, until one merry girl, spying his forlorn visage, grinned and called out with a humorous drawl “Hop-pick—ers!” and then danced off with her laughing companions, one of whom said, “Aw, come off! You’re rushin’ the season. Hop’s ain’t ripe yet.”

Seth felt deeply humiliated at this. He had been vaguely musing upon the general impudence of his coming to this strange city to teach its people daily on all subjects, from government down, while he did not even know how to gracefully get his bag off the street. This incident added the element of wounded self-pride to his discomfort—for even casual passers-by were evidently able to tell by his appearance that he was a farmer. Strange! neither Albert nor

John had told him anything calculated to serve him in this dilemma. They had warned him plentifully as to what not to do. Indeed his head was full of negative information, of pit-falls to avoid, temptations to guard against. But on the affirmative side it was all a blank. John had, it was true, advised him to get board with some quiet family, but if there were any representatives of such quiet families in the crowd surging past, how was he to know them?

While he tormented himself with this perplexing problem, two clerks came out of the store next to which he stood, to pull up the awning and prepare for night. A tall young man, with his hands deep in his trouser's pockets, and a flat straw hat much on one side of his head, sauntered across the street to them, and was greeted familiarly.

"Well, Tom," shouted one of these clerks, "you just everlastingly gave it to that snide show to-night. *Wasn't* it a scorcher, though?"

The young man with the straw hat put on a satisfied smile: "That's the only way to do it," he said lightly. "The sooner these fakirs understand that they can't play Tecumseh people for chumps, the better. If the *Chronicle* keeps on pounding 'em, they'll begin to give us a wide berth. Their advance agent thought he could fix me by opening a pint bottle of champagne. That may work in Hornellsville, but when he gets to-night's *Chronicle* I fancy he'll twig that it doesn't go down here."

"Oh, by the way, Tom," said the other clerk, in a

low tone of voice, "my sister's engaged to Billy Peters. I don't know that she wants to have it given away, that is, names, and everything, but you might kind o' hint at it. It would please the old folks, I think—you know father's taken the *Chronicle* for the last twenty years."

"I know" said Tom, producing an old envelope from a side pocket and making some dashes on it with a pencil—"the regulation gag: 'It is rumored that a rising young hat-dealer will shortly lead to the altar one of the bright, particular social stars of Brewery street' eh? Something like that?"

"Yes, that's it. You know how to fix it so that everybody'll know who is meant. Be around at Menzel's to-night?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll look in. The beer's been fearfully flat there, though, this last carload. So long, boys!"—and Tom moved down the street while the clerks re-entered the store.

Seth followed him eagerly, and touched him on the shoulder, saying:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I heard you mention the *Chronicle* just now. I would be much obliged if you could tell me where the office is."

The young man turned, looked Seth over and said, affably enough:

"Certainly. But you'll find it shut up. The book-keeper's gone home." Then he added, as by a happy afterthought: "If you want to pay a weekly subscription, though, I can take it, just as well as not."

"No," answered Seth, "I've come to work on the *Chronicle*."

"Oh—printer? I guess some of the fellows are there still, throwing in their cases. If you like, I'll show you."

Seth replied, with some embarrassment, "No, I'm not a printer. I've come to be—to be—an editor."

Tom's manner changed in a twinkling from civility to extreme cordiality.

"Oh—ho! you're the new man from Thessaly, eh? Jack Fairchild's brother! By Jove! How *are* you, anyway? When did you get in? Where are you stopping?"

"I'm not stopping anywhere—unless it be this stairway here," Seth replied, pointing to his carpet-bag with a smile, for his companion's cheerfulness was infectious. "I came in half an hour ago, and I scarcely knew where to go, or what to do first. I gather that you are connected with the *Chronicle*."

"Well, I should remark!" said Tom, taking the bag up as he spoke. "Come along. We'll have some supper down at Bismarck's, and leave your grip there for the evening. We can call for it on our way home. You'll stop with me to-night, you know. It ain't a particularly fly place, but we'll manage all right, I guess. And how's Jack?"

In the delight of finding so genial a colleague, one, too, who had known and worked with his brother, Seth's heart rose, as they walked down the street again. He had been more than a little dismayed at the prospect of meeting these unknown

writers whose genius radiated in the columns of the *Chronicle*, and in whose company he was henceforth to labor. Especially had he been nervous lest he should not speak with sufficient correctness, and should shock their fastidious ears with idioms insensibly acquired in the back-country. It was a great relief to find that this gentleman was so easy in his conversation, not to say colloquial.

They stopped presently at a broad open door, flanked by wide windows, in which were displayed a variety of bright-tinted play bills, and two huge pictures of a goat confidently butting a small barrel. There was a steep pile of these little, dark-colored barrels on the sidewalk at the curb, from which came a curious smell of resin. As they entered, Seth discovered that this odor belonged to the whole place.

The interior was dark and, to the country youth's eyes, unexpectedly vast. The floor was sprinkled with gray sand. An infinitude of small, circular oak tables, each surrounded with chairs, stretched out in every direction into the distant gloom. Away at the farther end of the place, somebody was banging furiously on a piano. In the middle distance, three elderly men sat smoking long pipes and playing dominoes, silently, save for the sharp clatter of the pieces. Nearer, three other men, seated about a table, were all roaring in German at the top of their lungs, pounding with their glasses on the resounding wood, and making the most excited and menacing gestures. While Seth stared at them,

expecting momentarily to see the altercation develop into blows, he felt himself clutched by the arm, and heard Tom say:

"Bismarck, this is Mr. Fairchild, a new *Chronicle* man. You must use him as well as you do me."

Seth turned and found himself shaking hands with an old German monstrous in girth, and at once fierce and comical in aspect, with short, upright gray hair, a huge yellowish-white moustache, and little piggish blue eyes nearly hidden from view by the wave of fat which rendered his great purple face as featureless as the bottom of a platter.

"Who effer vas Misder Vott's frent, den you bed he owens dis whole houwus," this stout gentleman wheezed out, smiling warmly, and releasing Seth's hand to indicate, with a sweeping gesture of his pudgy paw, the extent of Seth's new and figurative possessions.

On the invitation of the host they all took seats, and a lean, wolfish-faced young man named "Ow-goost," who shuffled along pushing his big slippers on the floor, brought three tall foaming glasses of dark-brown beer. Seth did not care for beer, and had always, in a general way, avoided saloons and drink, but of course, under these circumstances, it would be ridiculous not to do as the others did. The beverage was bitter, but not unpleasant, and with an effort he drank it half down at a time, as he saw his companions do. Then he looked about, while they discussed the merits of this new "bock," Tom speaking with an air of great authority, and

pronouncing it better than the last, but a bit too cold.

The piano was still jangling, and the dominoes were being rattled around for a new game. The three noisy old men had grown, if possible, more violent and boisterous than ever. One of them now sprang to his feet, lifted his right hand dramatically toward the dusky ceiling, and bellowed forth sonorously something which Seth thought must be at least a challenge to immediate combat, while the others hammered their glasses vehemently, and fairly shrieked dissent.

"I'm afraid those men are going to fight," he said.

"Fight? Nonsense! They're rather quieter than usual," remarked Tom. "What are they chewing on to-night, Bismarck—the Sigel racket?"

"Yes," said their host, listening indifferently. "Dot's Sigel." Then, addressing Seth, he explained: "Somedimes it's Sigel, unt somedimes the reffolution uff forty-eight, unt den somedimes der k-vestion of we haf a vood bafement by Main streed. It all makes no differunce to dem, vicheffer ding dey shdarts mit, dey git yust so much oxcited. Dot rooster you see standing up mit der spegtacles, dot Henery Beckstein, he's a tailor; he sits mid his legs tvisted all day, den when night comes he needs some exercises. Efery night for tweluf years he comes here, unt has his liddle dalk, und de udders, dey always pitches into him. He likes dot better as his dinner. De vurst is, dey all don't know vat dey

talk about. I bleef, so help me Gott, no one of 'em ever laid eyes by Sigel, unt dey all svear he vas deir dearest frent. Now—hear dot! Dot Beckstein say uff he didn't shleep mid him four years in his dent, in de same bet! How was dot for lies, huh?"

The host, pained and mortified at this mendacity, left his seat and waddled over to the disputants, shouting as he went, and joined the conversation so earnestly that his little eyes seemed bursting from his beet-red face.

"Great old man, that," said Tom, pounding with his glass for the waiter; "there's no flies on *him*! I named him Bismarck three or four years ago—everybody calls him that now—and it tickled him so, there's nothing here too good for me. You like cheese, don't you?"

"Well, yes, I eat cheese sometimes."

Seth never *had* eaten this kind of cheese which Owgoost presently slapped down before them, along with a mustard cup, a long bulging roll of black bread, and more beer. It was pale and hard and strong of scent, was cut in thick slabs, and was to be eaten, he judged from Tom's procedure, under a heavy top-dressing of the brown mustard. He liked it though, and was interested to find how well beer went with it, or it went with beer. Then they had each a little pickled lambs-tongue, pink and toothsome, to be eaten with plenty of salt, and it was quite remarkable how ideally beer seemed to go with this, too. In all, three large glasses went.

Tom was a delightful companion. It was simply

charming to hear him talk, as he did almost continuously, describing the round of life in Tecumseh, relating gay little anecdotes of personal experience, and commenting trenchantly on various men as they came in. To some of these he introduced Seth. They seemed extremely affable young people, and some of them who took seats near by invited Tom and him with much fervor and still greater frequency, to have their glasses filled up. The former accepted these proffers very freely, but the beer did not taste as good to Seth as it had during supper, and he kept to his one glass—the fourth—sipping at it from time to time. Tom was so urgent about it, though, that he did take a cigar, a dark, able-bodied cigar which annoyed him by burning up on one side.

The beer-hall presented a brilliant appearance now, with all the lights flaming, with most of the chairs filled by merry young men, with three or four white-jacketed waiters flitting about, bearing high in air both hands full of foaming glasses—a fine contrast to the dingy, bare interior of the twilight, with only the solitary Owgoost. Above the ceaseless hum of conversation and laughter, rose, at intervals, the strains of lively music from the far-off piano, reinforced now by a harp and a flute.

After a time cards were proposed, and Tom made one of a quartette who ranged themselves at the table. Seth could not play, and so moved his chair back, to watch the game. His cigar burned badly and he relighted it. Then it tasted bitter, and, after some hesitation, he threw it away. The game,

called seven-up, was one he had never seen before; the ten-spots were invested with a fictitious value which puzzled him. Tom, over whose shoulder he watched had three of these tens, and silently indicated to Seth that they were of especial interest. Seth fixed his eyes upon them, to see how they were to be managed. They were very curious ten-spots, being made of beer-glasses running over with lambs-tongues, with lambs chasing them to rescue their lamented members, and burly "Bismarck" striving in vain to secure order. General Sigel came to help him, and Tom dealt him a terrific blow. Here *was* a fight at last, and John Fairchild stood by, rapidly taking notes. Then it came bed-time, and—Seth was being shaken into sensibility by Tom, who said between fits of chuckling:

"Wake up, old boy! Wake up!"

Another great change had taken place in the beer-hall—the lights were out, the music had ceased, the crowd was gone. A solitary gas-jet flickered from the chandelier over the table; the game was ended, and the players were standing ready to depart, and laughing. Fat Bismarck stood behind him, in the half-shadow, looking very sleepy, and he seemed to be grinning too.

Seth saw all this first. Then he discovered that he held his collar and necktie in his hand, and that his coat and waistcoat were on the table. He dimly began to understand that he had been asleep, and that, in the operation of his dream, he had commenced undressing. Everybody was laughing at

him, his friend Tom, who now was helping him on with his coat, most heartily of all.

"I declare," Seth said, "I must have fallen asleep. I had no idea—I suppose I was dreaming of getting ready for bed."

"Oh, dots all right, dots all right," said Bismarck heartily. "Ve don'd mind it a bit. You vas only dired owut."

"Yes, that's it," said Tom, "he'd had a hard day of it, traveling all the way from Thessaly. Are you ready? We'll get the bag, and trot along home. Good night, boys!"

Seth responded to the chorus of answering "good nights," and the twain started out. Tom not only carried the bag, but took his companion's arm—much to Seth's satisfaction, for he felt very tired, and it seemed unusually difficult for him to shake off his sleepiness. Tom was more talkative than ever, and he seemed to be saying extremely clever things, but Seth somehow did not follow their meaning, and he could think of nothing to say in reply. They were in a dark side street now.

"Ah, I thought he'd be open!" said Tom, abruptly, stopping before a place, through the closed shutters of which long horizontal threads of light gleamed. "Let's go in and have a night-cap. It'll set you straight in a minute."

The curious reluctance to speak, of which Seth had felt vaguely conscious all along, now prompted acquiescence as the easiest course, and he followed Tom into a small, low room, thick with cigar-smoke

and the odor of kerosene, where four or five men, with their hats tilted over their eyes, were playing cards: there was a pile of money in the centre of the table, to which each in turn seemed to be adding from a smaller heap before him. They were so much engrossed in the game that they only nodded at Tom, and Seth felt relieved at escaping the ordeal of being introduced to them. At Tom's suggestion he took a little glass of brandy—"to do their duty by the National debt,"—what ever that meant. It was burning, nauseous stuff, which brought the tears to his eyes, but it made him feel better.

It especially enabled him to talk, which he proceeded to do now with a fluency that surprised him. Tom was evidently much impressed by his remarks, saying little, it is true, but gripping his arm more closely. Thus they walked to Tom's lodgings—a tall, dark brick house opposite a long line of coal sheds. The hall was so dark that Seth, in trying to follow his guide, stumbled over an umbrella-rack, and fell to the floor. Tom assisted him to rise, with a paternal "steady now, steady; that's it, lean on me," and so helped him up the two flights of steep, narrow stairs. In all the world, it seemed to Seth, he could not have met a more amiable or congenial friend than Tom, and he told him so, as they climbed the stairs, affectionately leaning upon his arm, and making his phrases as ornate in diction and warm in tone as he could.

"Here we are," said Tom, opening a door, and lighting a lamp which revealed a small, scantily-

furnished room, in extreme disorder. "Make yourself at home, my boy. Smoke a pipe before you go to bed?"

"Oh, mercy, no. I think—do you know, I feel a little dizzy."

"Oh, you'll be all right in the morning. Just undress and pile into bed. I'll smoke a pipe first."

Half an hour after Seth's first day in the World had closed in heavy slumber, Tom looked at him before blowing out the light, and smiled to himself:

"He *is* about as fresh as they make 'em."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SANCTUM.

THE young men dressed next morning in almost complete silence. Tom was still sleepy, and seemed much less jovial and attractive than he had been the previous evening; Seth, accustomed to far earlier rising, was acutely awake, but his head ached wearily and there was a dreadful dryness in his mouth and throat. They went through the forms of breakfast in the basement, too, without much conversation. Seth was ashamed of the number of cups of coffee he drank, and carried away only confused recollections of having been introduced to a middle-aged woman in black who sat at the head of the table, and of having perfunctorily answered sundry questions about business in Dearborn County, put by a man who sat next to him.

They were well on their way to the office before Tom's silent mood wore away.

"You must brace up!" he said. "Don't let Workman know that we were out together last night. He's a regular crank about beer—that is, when anybody but himself drinks it. What's the matter? You look as melancholy as a man going to be hanged."

"I suppose I'm nervous about the thing. It's all going to be so new and strange at the start."

"Oh, that'll be all right. You'll get the hang of it fast enough. They are rather decent fellows to work with upstairs, all but Samboye. He'll try to sit on you from the start, but if you hold your own with him you'll get along with the rest."

"Samboye—he's the editor, isn't he?"

"Yes. You don't know any of them, I suppose?"

"Not even by name."

"Well, after Workman, who's very rightly named, and who runs the thing, there's Samboye, who koo-toos to Workman and bullies all the rest. He puts on more airs than a mowing machine agent at a state fair. He makes *everybody* tired. Next to him comes Tyler—Tony Tyler, you'll like him—that is, if he takes a fancy to you. He knows about eighteen hundred times as much as Samboye does, only somehow he hasn't the faculty of putting it on paper. Too much whisky. Then there's Dent—he's a Young Man Christian; plays duets on the piano with his sister, you know, and all that sort of thing—but he's away now on his vacation. And then Billy Murtagh—he's a rattling good fellow, if you don't let him borrow money of you. He does part of the telegraph and news. Those are the only fellows upstairs."

"But where do you come in?"

"Me? Oh, I'm the City Editor. I and my gang are downstairs. I made a strike to have you down

with me, and put you on police court, but Workman wouldn't have it. It's all poppycock, for they've got more men upstairs now than they know what to do with. However, if Workman thinks the people want to read editorials on the condition of Macedonia more than they do local news, he can go ahead. It's none of my funeral."

"Do you know what special work I am to do?"

"From all I hear, it would be easier to tell what you're not to do. Everyone of them has got a scheme for unloading something on you. First you're to do a lot of Dent's work, like the proofs and Agricultural and Religious; then Murtagh wants to put State News on you, and Tyler tells me you've got to do the weekly as soon as you get your hand in, and Art, Music and the Drama is a thing that must go up stairs, now that the baseball season has begun, for I can't attend to it. But if they play it too low down on you, just you make a stout kick to Workman about it."

While Seth pondered this outlook and advice, they reached the *Chronicle* office, and presently, by a succession of dark and devious stair-ways, he found himself in an ancient cockloft, curiously cut up by low partitions into compartments like horse-stalls, each with a window at the end, and was introduced as "the new man" to Mr. Anthony Tyler, otherwise Tony.

This gentleman bore no outward signs of the excess of spirituous liquor to which Tom had alluded, and was very cordial and pleasant. He was ex-

tremely dark in hair, beard and eyes, seemed to be not more than thirty, and sat at a table piled high with books, clippings and the like, and surrounded by great heaps of papers. Tom glanced over two or three of these latter, and then went off humming a tune lightly and calling out to Seth in imitation of a popular air, as he rattled down stairs "I'll meet you when the form goes down."

Among other polite questions Tyler asked Seth where he was stopping.

"Nowhere permanently. I must find some place. I stopped last night with Mr. Votts."

"With whom?"

"With Mr. Votts, the gentleman who just left us."

"Oh, you mean Tom Watts. You've got his name wrong."

"Come to think of it, it was a German who called him that last evening, and I was misled by his pronunciation."

Mr. Tyler's face grew more serious.

"You are a stranger here. Let me give you some advice. Don't cultivate Mr. Watts' German friends. He's not a bad chap of his sort, but he drinks altogether too much beer. Who drinks beer, thinks beer, as Johnson says. Perhaps I can be of use to you in the matter of a boarding house. Oh, here's Murtagh," he continued introducing Seth to another tall, slender young man who had come up the stairs with an arm-full of papers; "he will take you now, and give you an idea of your work." Whereupon

Mr. Tyler turned again to his papers and shears, and Seth followed the new comer to the farthest stall in the row, which was henceforth to be his own.

There came a brief quarter of an hour in the afternoon when what seemed to the novice a state of the wildest excitement reigned in the editorial room. An inky boy in a huge leather apron dashed from stall to stall shouting an interrogative "Thirty for you?" His master and patron, the foreman, also aproned from chin to knees, with shirt-sleeves rolled to the biceps, followed with the same mysterious question, put in an injured and indignant tone. A loud, sharp discussion between this magnate and Tyler, profanely dictatorial on the one side, profanely satirical on the other, rose suddenly and filled the room with its clamor. An elderly man, bald as a billiard ball, and dressed like a clergyman, came bounding up the stairs, pulling out his watch as he advanced, and demanding fiercely the reason for this delay. There was an outburst of explanation, in which four or five voices joined, mingling personal abuse freely with their analysis of the situation. Tom Watts leaped up the stairs four steps at a time and hurled himself into the controversy. Seth could distinguish in this babel of exclamations such phrases as—

"You better get some india-rubber chases!" "If that fire's cut down, you might as well not go to press at all!" "If somebody would get down here in the morning, we could get our matter up in

time." "I'm sick and tired of getting out telegraph for these chuckle-headed printers to throw on the floor!" "That Mayhew matter's been standing on the galleys so long already that it's got grey-headed!" "By the Lord Harry, I'll make a rule that the next time we miss the Wyoming mail it shall be taken out of your wages!"

Here the inky boy galloped through to Seth with a proof-sheet, shouting, "You've got a minute and a half to read this in!" The bald, elderly gentleman, who seemed to be Mr. Workman, came and stood over Seth, watch in hand, scowling impatiently. Under this embarrassment the wet letters danced before his eyes, and he could find no errors, though it turned out later that he had passed "elephant" for "elopement" and ruined Watts' chief sensation. A few minutes later, the clang of the presses in the basement shook the old building, and the inky boy bustled through the room again, pitching a paper into each of the stalls. There was a moment of silence, broken only by the soft rustling of the damp sheets. Then simultaneously from the several tables rose a chorus of violent ob-
jurgation.

Seth heard the voice which he had learned was Samboye's roar out, "What dash-dashed idiot has made me say 'our martyr President Abraham Sinclair?' Stop the press!" There were other voices: "Here's two lines of markets upside down!" "Oh, I say, this is *too* bad. *Mbyen age* is 'mayonaise' in my Shylock notice, and it's Mrs. McCullough instead

of Mr." "I'm dashed if the paper looks as if it had been read at all. We can't have such proof-reading as this!"

While these comments were still proceeding the noise of the press suddenly ceased. The silence was terrible to Seth's guilty consciousness, for he had heard enough to know that it was his fault. Mr. Workman entered the room again, and again Samboye's deep voice was heard, repeating the awful Sinclair-Lincoln error. Seth had looked at his fresh copy of the *Chronicle*, with some vague hope that the Editor was mistaken, but alas! it was too true. Mr. Workman came over to his stall; he had put his watch back in his pocket, but his countenance was stern and unbending.

"You are Mr. Fairchild, I presume," he said.

Seth rose to his feet, blushing, and murmured, "Yes, sir."

"I understood from your brother that you were used to newspaper work."

"Well, I thought I was. I have been around the *Banner of Liberty* office a great deal, but it seems so different on a daily."

"H'm,—yes. Well, I dare say you'll learn."

Luckily the press started up again here, and Mr. Workman, looking at his watch once more, went down stairs.

Seth felt most grievously depressed. Looking back, his first day had been full of mortification and failure. The use of scissors and mucilage brush was painfully unfamiliar to his clumsy fingers. The

scope and intention of the various news departments he had been told to take charge of were unknown to him, and he had watched Murtagh go over the matter he submitted, striking out page after page, saying curtly, "We've had this," "This is only worth a line or two," or "this belongs in county notes," with a sinking heart. His duties were so mechanical and commonplace, after what he had conceived an editor's functions to be, that his ineptitude was doubly humiliating.

Then there was this dreadful proof-reading failure. Murtagh had given him the sample proof-sheet in the back of the dictionary to copy his marks from—and he had copied them with such scrupulous efforts after exactness that the printers couldn't understand them. These printers—he could see them through the windows opposite, standing pensively over their tall cases, and moving their right arms between the frames and their sticks with the monotonous regularity of an engine's piston-rod—seemed a very sarcastic and disagreeable body of men, to judge by the messages of criticism on his system of marking which the inky boy had delivered for them with such fidelity and enjoyment during the day. He had eaten nothing since the early breakfast, and felt faint and tired. The rain outside, beating dismally on the window and the tin roof beyond, added to his gloom, and the ceaseless drumming of the presses below increased his headache.

The other men seemed to have nothing to do now save to talk, but he turned wearily to the great

mound of exchanges from which Murtagh had directed him to extract "Society Jottings" and "Art, Music and the Drama" after the paper went to press.

He spent a few despairing minutes on the threshold of the task—enough to see clearly that it was beyond his strength. Society was Syriac to him, and he had never seen a play acted, beyond an occasional presentation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or "The Octoroon" by strolling tenth-rate mummers in the tiny hall at Thessaly. How could he select matter for such departments? He wavered for a time, from a disinclination to confront men who had just condemned his work so unsparingly, but at last he got up from the table where he had been pinned all day, and went over to the further end of the room.

There was a sort of conclave about Tyler's table. Both he and Samboye reclined in tipped-back chairs, with their feet upon it; Watts sat on the table swinging his legs, his straw hat still on the back of his head, and Murtagh was perched in the window seat. Their conversation, which had been flowing freely, stopped as Seth approached. He had expected to be introduced to his Editor, Mr. Samboye, but no one seemed to think of it, and that gentleman himself relieved him of the embarrassment by nodding not uncourteously but with formality.

"Mr. Fairchild," he said, with impressive slowness, "in the pursuit of a high career you will be powerfully aided by keeping in recollection the fact that

the sixteenth President of the United States was named Lincoln and not Sinclair. We have a prejudice too, weak as it may seem, in favor of spelling 'interval' with a 'v' rather than an 'n'."

Seth did not find it so difficult to address this great man as he had anticipated. He said simply that he was very sorry, but the work was utterly new to him, it was his first day, he hoped to learn soon, etc. Emboldened by the sound of his own voice, he added his doubts about being able to satisfactorily preside over such exacting columns as "Society Jottings" and "Art, Music and the Drama"—and gave reasons.

"By George!" cried Watts, "I envy you! Just fancy a man who has never seen anything but 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'—and not even that with real Siberian bloodhounds. You shall begin going to-night. I'll take you to 'Muldoon's Picnic.'"

"Well, at any rate," remarked Mr. Tyler, "you can do 'Agricultural.' You must know that right down to the ground."

"Yes," assented Seth, "I think I ought to manage that. The truth is, most of the stuff the papers print for farmers is nonsense—pure rubbish."

"I suppose it is. I know that Dent—he is a New York city boy, who doesn't know clover from cabbage—once put in a paragraph about the importance of feeding chickens on rock salt, and an old farmer from Boltus came in early one morning and whaled the bookkeeper out of his boots because he had followed the advice and killed all his hens. There

must be some funny man out West somewhere who makes up these bad agricultural paragraphs, and of course they get copied. How can fellows like Dent, for instance, tell which are good and which are not? But they can't fool you, and that'll be an advantage. Then there's Religious. You can do that easily enough. I should think."

"Yes," interposed Murtagh, "all you have to do is to lay for the *Obago Evening Mercury*. Every Saturday that has a column of religious. Alec Watson, a fellow in that office, has fifty-two of these columns, extracts from Thomas à Kempis, and Wesley and Spurgeon and that sort of thing, which have been running in the *Mercury* since before the war. When New Year's comes he starts 'em going again, round and round. Nobody knows the difference. Well, their columns are longer than ours, so each week you can run about half their paragraphs—the shortest ones—and then fill in with some news notes, statistics, you know, about how many churches the Moravians have now, and that sort of thing. You can pick those up during the week, anywhere."

"Then there ought to be some originality about it too," said Tom Watts. "It is just as well to sling in some items of your own, I think, such as 'There is a growing desire among the Baptists to have Bishops, like other people,' or, 'It is understood that at the coming Consistory the Pope will create seven new American Cardinals.' That last is a particularly good point. Every once in a while, predict more Cardinals. It doesn't hurt anybody, and it

makes you solid when the thing does happen. There's nothing like original news to show the influence of journalism. One morning, after the cakes had been bad for a week, heavy, sour or something else, I said to my landlady that I believed the fault must be in the buckwheat. She said no, she didn't think so, for the flour looked very nice indeed. I put a line in 'Local Glimpses' that day, saying that unfortunately the buckwheat this year was of inferior quality, and the very next morning she apologised to me: said I was right; the buckwheat *was* bad; she had read so in the *Chronicle*. Can you imagine a nobler illustration of the power of the press?"

Seth looked attentively at the speaker, to see if he was joking, but there was no more evidence of mirth in his thin face than in the serious tone of his voice. None of the others laughed.

Mr. Samboye said some of the most remarkable things, at once humorous and highly original, and put in an elaborate frame of big unusual words. He was a huge man in frame, with an enormous head, bushy eyebrows, heavy whiskers, a ponderous manner, a tremendous voice—in fact seemed to Seth precisely the kind of man from whom delicate wit, and soft shading of phrases were not to be expected. He happened for the nonce to be in a complaisant mood, and was relaxing himself in the company of "his young men," as he liked to call his colleagues. But ordinarily he was overbearing and arbitrary, and this had rankled so deeply in their minds that they

listened with apathy, unresponsive, to his choicest sallies, and Watts even combated him, with scant courtesy it seemed to Seth.

To him this monologue of the Editor's was a revelation. He had never heard such brilliant talk, such a wonderful mastery of words, such delicious humor. He drank it all in eagerly, and laughed aloud at its broader points—the more heartily, perhaps, because no one else smiled. This display of appreciation bore fruit after its kind. Before Mr. Samboye went he spoke some decidedly gracious words to Seth, saying among other things:

“However harshly we may be tempted by momentary stress of emotion to speak, always remember that we unitedly feel your fresh bucolic interest in things, your virginal capacity for admiration, and your pristine flush of enthusiasm for your work to be distinct acquisitions to the paper,” which Seth felt to be somewhat nonsensical, but still was grateful for.

After Mr. Samboye had gone, Tom Watts took occasion to warn him in an aside:

“Be careful how you appear to curry favor with Samboye before the other fellows. Oh, I know you didn't think of it—but don't laugh at his jokes. They'll think you're trying to climb over them, and they'll be unpleasant to you, perhaps.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THIRTEEN MONTHS OF IT.

GROWING familiarity with his work did not restore to Seth the lofty conceptions of journalism's duties and delights which he had nourished on the hill-side farm, and which had been so ingloriously dimmed and defaced by his first day's experience.

The tasks set before him, to which he gradually became accustomed, seemed almost as unintellectual and mechanical as the ploughing and planting he had forsaken. The rule of condensation, compression, continually dinned into his ears by his mentors, robbed his labors of all possible charm. To "boil down" columns of narrative into a few lines of bald, cold statement; to chronicle day after day in the curtest form, fires, failures, crimes, disasters, deaths, in a wearying chain of uninteresting news notes; to throw remorselessly into the journalistic crucible all the work of imagination, of genius, of deep fine thought which came into his hands, together with the wordy dross spun out by the swarm of superficial scribblers, and extract from good and bad alike only the meaningless, miserable fact—this was a task against which, in the first weeks of experience, his whole soul revolted.

By the time he had become reconciled to it, and had mastered its tricks, his dream of journalism as the most exalted of all departments of activity seemed to him like some far-away fantasy of childhood.

He not only had failed to draw inspiration from his work; it was already ceasing to interest him. Under pleasanter conditions, he felt that he would have at least liked the proof-reading portion of the daily routine; but the printers were so truculent and hostile, and seemed so pre-determined to treat him as their natural enemy, that this was irksome, too. There was no relief to the distasteful monotony in other branches of his work. Even the agricultural column, which he had promised himself to so vastly improve, yielded no satisfaction. The floating, valueless stuff from which his predecessors had selected their store came so easily and naturally to the scissors that after a week or two he abandoned the idea of preparing original matter: it saved time and labor, and nobody seemed to know the difference. These words, in fact, came to describe his mental attitude toward all his work. He had no pride in it. If he escaped curses for badly-read proofs, and criticism for missing obvious matters of news, it was enough.

Seth did not arrive at this condition of mind without much inner protest, or without sundry efforts to break through the crust of perfunctory drudgery which was encasing him. At the start he bestowed considerable thought and work upon an effort to

brighten and improve, by careful re-working of materials, one of the departments entrusted to him, and, just when he expected praise, Tyler told him to stop it. Then he tried to make his religious column a feature by discarding most of the ancient matter which revolved so drolly in the *Obago Evening Mercury*, and picking out eloquent bits from the sermons of great contemporary preachers; but this elicited denominational protest from certain pious subscribers, and Mr. Workman commanded a return to the old rut.

But *the* cruel humiliation came when Seth took to Mr. Samboye an editorial paragraph he had written with great care. It was a political paragraph, and Seth felt confident that it was exactly in the *Chronicle's* line, and good writing as well. The Editor took it, after regarding the young writer with a stony, half-surprised stare, and read it over slowly. He delivered judgment upon it, in his habitual pomposity of phrases: "This is markedly comprehensive in scope and clarified in expression, Mr. Fairchild." Then, as Seth's heart was warming with a sense of commendation and success, the Editor calmly tore the manuscript in strips, dropped them in his waste-basket, and turned reflectively to his newspaper.

Seth's breath nearly left him: "Then you can't use it;" he faltered. "I thought it might do for an editorial paragraph."

There was the faintest suggestion of a patronising smile on Mr. Samboye's broad, ruddy face.

“Oh, I am reminded, Mr. Fairchild,” he answered, with bland irrelevance; “pray do not allow Porte to pass again with a small p, as you did yesterday in the proof of my Turkish article. It should be capitalized invariably.”

The beginner went back to his stall both humiliated and angry. The cool insolence with which he had been reminded that he was a proof-reader, and warned away from thoughts of the editorial page, enraged and depressed him. He passed a bitter hour at his table, looking savagely through the window at the automatic motions of the printer directly opposite, but thinking evil thoughts of Samboye, and cursing the fate which had led him into newspaper work. So uncomfortable did he make himself by these reflections that it required a real effort to throw off their effects when Watts came upstairs, and the two left the office for the day. It was impossible not to relate his grievance.

Tom did not see its tragic side, and refused utterly to concede that Seth ought to be cast down by it.

“That’s only Samboye’s way,” he said, lightly. “He won’t let any of the fellows get on to the page, simply because he’s afraid they’ll outwrite him. He’d rather do it all himself—and he does grind out an immense load of stuff—than encourage any rivals. Besides, he never loses a chance to snub youngsters. Don’t let it worry you for a minute. If he sees that it does, he’ll only pile it on the thicker. In this business you’ve got to have a hide on you

like the behemoth of Holy Writ, or you'll keep raw all the while."

Seth found some consolation in this view, and more still in Tom's cheery tone. The two young men spent the evening together—at Bismarck's.

This came gradually but naturally to be Seth's habitual evening resort. It represented to him, indeed, all that was friendly and inviting in Tecumseh society. He was able to recall dimly some of the notions of coming social distinction he indulged in the farm days—dreams of a handsome young editor who was in great request in the most refined and luxurious home circles, who said the most charming things to beautiful young ladies at parties and balls, who wavered in his mind between wedding his employer's daughter and taking a share in the paper, or choosing some lowlier but more intellectual maid to wife, and leading with her a halcyon and exaltedly literary career in a cottage—but they were as unreal, as indistinct now as the dreams of night before last. All the social bars seemed drawn against him as a matter of course.

This did not impress him as a hardship, because he was only vaguely conscious of it, at first, and then grew into the habit of regarding it as a thing to be grateful for. Tom Watts pointed out to him frequently the advantage of being a Bohemian, of being free from all the fearsome, undefined routine and responsibility of making calls, of dressing up in the evening, and of dangling supine attendance upon girls and their mammas. This "social racket,"

the city editor said, might please some people; Dent, for instance, seemed to like it. But for his part it seemed quite the weakest thing a young man could go in for—entirely incompatible with the robust and masculine character demanded in a successful journalist.

This presented itself to Seth as an extremely sound position, and he made it his own so willingly that very soon he began to take credit to himself in his own eyes for having turned a deaf ear to the social siren, and having deliberately rejected the advances of fashionable Tecumseh. He grew really to believe that it was by preference, by a wise resolution to preserve his freedom and individuality, that he remained outside the mysterious, impalpable regions which were labelled in his mind as "Society." On the other hand, there was no nonsense at Bismarck's, or at the other similar beer halls to which Tom introduced him. One dressed as one chose, and did as one liked; seven-up or penochle provided just the mental recreation a wearied literary brain demanded; and the fellows one met there were cheerful, companionable young men, who likewise had no nonsense about them, who put on no airs of superiority, and who glided swiftly and jovially through the grades of acquaintanceship to intimacy.

Seth was greatly strengthened in his liking for this refuge from loneliness in a strange city by what he saw of Arthur Dent, whom Watts had prepared him to regard as the embodiment of the other and strait-laced side.

This young man was not at all uncivil, but he was delicate, almost effeminate in frame, wore eye-glasses, dressed with fastidious neatness, never made any jokes or laughed heartily at those of others, and rarely joined the daily lounge and smoke around Tyler's table after the paper had gone to press—and in all these things he grated upon Seth's sensitiveness. He was the one member of the staff whom Mr. Workman seemed to like and whom Mr. Samboye never humiliated publicly by his ponderous ridicule, and these were added grievances. He worked very steadily and carefully, and was said to do a good deal of heavy reading at home, evenings, in addition to the slavish routine of high social duties in which Seth indefinitely understood him to be immersed. His chief tasks were the book reviews, the editing of correspondence, and the preparation of minoreditorial paragraphs in a smaller type than Mr. Samboye's. Seth thought that his style, though correct and neat, was thin and emasculated, and he came to associate this with his estimate of the writer, and account for it by his habits and associations—which the further confirmed him in his judgment as to the right way to live.

But there was something more than this. The first few days after his return from his vacation, Dent had tried to be courteous and helpful to the newcomer from the country, in his shy, undemonstrative way, and Seth, despite his preconceived prejudice, had gone a little way on the road to friendship. Then one night, as he and Watts were returning

arm-in-arm to their joint lodgings from Bismarck's, a trifle unsteadily perhaps, they had encountered Dent walking with a young lady, and Tom had pleasantly accosted them—at least it seemed pleasantly to Seth—but Dent had not taken it in the right spirit at the time, and had been decidedly cool to Seth ever since. This was so unreasonable that the country boy resented it deeply, and the two barely spoke to each other.

His relations with the others were less strained, but scarcely more valuable in the way of companionship. Mr. Tyler did not seem to care much for his company, and never asked him to go to the "Roast Beef"—a sort of combination of club and saloon where he spent most of his evenings, where poker was the chief amusement and whisky the principal drink. From all Seth could learn, it was as well for him that he was not invited there. As for Murtagh, all his associations outside the office seemed to be with young men of his own race, who formed a coterie by themselves, and frequented distinctively Irish resorts. Like most other American cities Tecumseh had its large Irish and German elements, and in nothing were ethnographic lines drawn so clearly as in the matter of amusements. There were enough young Americans holding aloof from both these foreign circles to constitute a small constituency for the "Roast Beef," but a far greater number had developed a liking for the German places of resort, and drank beer and ate cheese and rye bread as if to the manner born. Seth found himself in this class

on his first step over the threshold of city life; he enjoyed it, and he saw very little of the others.

The two most important men on the *Chronicle*, Mr. Workman and Mr. Samboye, were far removed from the plane upon which all these Bohemian divisions were traced. They belonged to the Club—the Tuscarora Club. Seth knew where the club house was—but he felt that this was all he was ever likely to know about it. The first few days in Tecumseh had taught him the hopelessness of his dream of associating with his employer. Socially they were leagues apart at the outset, and if the distance did not increase as weeks grew into months, at least Seth's perception of it did, which amounted to the same thing.

He did not so readily abandon the idea of being made a companion by Samboye, but at last that vanished too. The Editor held himself very high, and if he occasionally came down off his mountain top, his return to those heights only served to emphasize their altitude. There were conflicting stories about his salary. Among the lesser lights of the editorial room it was commonly estimated at forty-five dollars a week, but some of the printers had information that it was at least fifty—which fatigued the imagination. Seth himself received nine dollars, which his brother supplemented by five, and he found that he was regarded as doing remarkably well for a beginner. But between this condition and the state of Samboye with his great income, his fine house on one of the best streets, his influential posi-

tion in the city, and his luxurious amusements at the Club, an impassable gulf yawned.

There is no pleasure in following further the details of the country boy's new life. He lost sight of his disappointment in the consolations of a phase of city existence which does not show to advantage in polite pages. He did not become vicious or depraved. The relentless treadmill of a daily paper forbade his becoming indolent. By sheer force of contact his mind expanded, too, more than even he suspected. But it was a formless, unprofitable expansion, which did not help him to get out of the rut. He performed his work acceptably—at least he rarely heard any criticisms upon it—lived a trifle ahead of his small income, and ceased to even speculate on the chance of promotion.

When, thirteen months after his advent in Tecumseh, the news came to him from the farm that his father was dying, he obtained leave to go home. Mr. Workman remarked to Mr. Samboye that afternoon:

“I shan't mind much if Fairchild doesn't come back.”

“Is that so? He seems to get through his work decently and inoffensively enough. He will never set the North River ablaze, of course, but he is civil and all that.”

“Yes, but I can't see that there's anything in him. Beside, I don't like his influence on Watts. I'm told you can find them together at Bismarck's every night in the week.”

"Of course, that makes it bad," said Mr. Samboye.

Then the proprietor and the editor locked up their desks, went over to the Club, and played pyramid pool till midnight.

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK ON THE FARM.

THE farm seemed very little like home to Seth, now that he was back once more upon it. He could neither fit himself familiarly into such of the old ways as remained nor altogether appetize the changes which he felt rather than discerned about him.

Of all these alterations his father's disappearance was among the least important. Everybody had grown out of the habit of considering Lemuel as a factor in any question. Nobody missed him now that he was gone, or felt that it was specially incumbent to pretend to do so—nobody save Aunt Sabrina. Those who cared to look closely could see that the old maid was shaken by her weak brother's death, and that, though she said little or nothing about it, an augmented sense of loneliness preyed upon her mind. For the rest, the event imposed a day or two of solemnity, some alterations of dress and demeanor, a sombre journey with a few neighbors to the little burial plot beyond the orchard—and then things resumed their wonted aspect.

To the young journalist this aspect was strange and curious. The farm had put on a new guise to his eyes. It was as if some mighty hand and brush

had painted it all over with bright colors. It was not only that the house had been restored and refurnished, that new spacious buildings replaced the ancient barns, that the fences had been rebuilt, the farm yard cleaned up and sodded, the old well-curb and reach removed—the very grass seemed greener, the bending of the boughs more graceful, the charm of sky and foliage and verdure far more apparent. The cattle were plumper and cleaner; there were carriage horses now, with bright harness and sweeping tails, and a costly black mare for the saddle, fleet as the wind: the food on the table was more uniformly toothsome, and there were now the broad silver-plated forks to which Seth had somewhat laboriously become accustomed in his Tecumseh boarding-house. He admired all these changes, in a way, but somehow he could not feel at home among them. They were attractive, but they were alien to the memories which, in his crowded, bricked-up city solitude, had grown dear to him.

There were droll changes among the hired people. For one thing, they no longer all ate at the table with the family. An exception was made in favor of Milton Squires, who had burst through the overalls chrysalis of hired-manhood, and had become a sort of superintendent. He had not learned to eat with a fork, and he still talked loudly and with boisterous familiarity at the table, reaching for whatever he wanted, and calling the proprietor "Albert," and his aunt "Sabriny." He did not bear his social and industrial promotion meekly. He bullied the inferior

hired men—Leander had a colleague now, a rough, tow-headed, burly young fellow named Dana Pillsbury—and snubbed loftily the menials of the kitchen. This former haunt scarcely knew him more, and his rare conversations with Alvira were all distinctly framed in condescension. This was only to be expected, for Milton wore a black suit of store-clothes every day, with a gold-plated watch chain and a necktie, and met the farmers round about on terms of practical equality. He was reputed to be a careful and capable manager; his wrath was feared at the cheese-factory; his judgment was respected at the corners' store. Naturally, such a man would feel himself above kitchen associations.

Of course this defection evoked deep wrath in Alvira's part of the house, some overflowings of which came to Seth's notice before he had been a day at the farm. Alvira was not specially changed to the young man's eyes—indeed her sallow, bilious visage, dark snapping eyes and furrowed forehead seemed the most familiar things about the homestead, and her acidulous tones struck a truer note in his chords of memory than did any other sound.

Aunt Sabrina, wrapped as of old in her red plaid shoulder shawl, but seemingly less erect and aggressive, spent most of her time in the kitchen, ostentatiously pretending to pay her board by culinary labor. Behind her back Alvira was wont to say to her assistant, a slatternly young slip from the ever-spreading Lawton family tree, that the old lady only hindered the work, and that her room would be bet-

ter than her company. But when Aunt Sabrina was present, Alvira was customarily civil, sometimes quite friendly. The two were drawn together by community of grievance.

They both hated Isabel, with her citified notions, her forks and napkins, and stuck-up airs generally. It had pleased Aunt Sabrina's mood to regard herself as included in the edict which ordained that servants should eat in the kitchen, and only the sharpest words she had ever heard Albert speak had prevented her acting upon this. She had come to the family table, then, but always with an air of protest; and she had a grim pleasure in leaving her napkin unfolded, month after month, and in keeping everybody waiting while she paraded her inability to eat rapidly or satisfactorily with the new fangled "split spoon."

She and Alvira had a never-failing topic of hostile talk in the new mistress. To judge by their threats, their jibes and their angry complaints, they were always on the point of leaving the house on her account. So imminent did an outbreak seem to Seth, when he first heard their joint budget of woes and bitter resolves, that he was frightened, but the Lawton girl reassured him. They had talked just like that, she said, every day since she had been there, which would be "a year come August," and she added scornfully: "They go away? You couldn't chase 'em away with a clothes-pole!"

The two elderly females had another bond of sympathy, of course, in Milton's affectation of superiority.

They debated this continually, though as Sabrina had the most to say about her niece-in-law, with Alvira as a sympathetic commentator, so the hateful apotheosis of the whilom hired-man was recognized to be Alvira's special and personal grievance, in girding at which Sabrina bore only a helping part.

Seth accounted for this by calling up in recollection an old vague understanding of his youth that Milton was some time going to marry Alvira. He could remember having heard this union spoken of as taken for granted in the family. Doubtless Alvira's present attitude of ugly criticism was due to the fear that Milton's improved prospects would lead him elsewhere. The Lawton girl indeed hinted rather broadly to him that there were substantial grounds for Alvira's rage. "I'd tear his eyes out if I was her, and he wouldn't come up to the scratch," she said, "after all that's happened." Seth understood her suggestion, but he didn't believe it. The Lawtons were a low-down race, anyway. He had seen one of the girls at Tecumseh once, a girl who had gone utterly to the bad, and this sister of hers seemed a bold, rude huzzy, with a mind prone to mean suspicions.

It was a relief to go back again to the living-room, where Isabel was, and he both verbally and mentally justified her gentle hint that the kitchen was not a good place for young men to spend their time.

"You have no idea," she said, letting her embroidery fall in her lap for the moment, "how ruinous to discipline and to household management

generally this country plan of making companions of your servants is. I had to put a complete stop to it, very soon after I came. There would be no living with them otherwise. There's not much comfort in living with them as it is, for your Aunt sits out in the kitchen all day long, pretending that she is abused and encouraging them to think that they are ill-used too. She makes it very hard for me—harping all the time on my being a Richardson, just as she did with your mother.

“Then there's Milton. I did not want to make any difference between him and the other hired people, but your brother insisted on it—on having him at the table with us, and treating him like an equal. He is as coarse and rough and horrid as he can be, but it seems that he is very necessary on the farm, and your brother leaves so much to him and relies so much on him that I couldn't help myself. He hasn't got to calling me 'Isabel' yet, but I expect him to begin every day of my life. You can't imagine what an infliction it is to see him eat—or rather, to hear him, for I try not to look.”

Isabel took up her work again, and Seth looked at her more closely than he had done before. She sat at the window, with the full summer light on her bright hair and fair, pretty face. Her tone had been melancholy, almost mournful; looking at her, Seth felt that she was not happy, and more—for he had never supposed her to be particularly happy—that she was bitterly disappointed with the result of the farm experiment. She had not said so, however,

and he was in doubt whether it would be wise for him to assume it in his conversation.

"Albert seems to thrive on country fare," he said, perhaps unconsciously suggesting in his remark what was turning in his mind—that she herself seemed not have thrived. The rounded outlines of her chin and throat were not so perfect as he remembered them. She looked thin and tired now, in the strong light, and there was no color to speak of in her face.

"Oh, yes!" she said, with that falling inflection which is sister to the sigh, and keeping her eyes bent upon her work, "*he* grows fat. I did not imagine that a man who had always been so active, who was so accustomed to regular office work and intellectual professional pursuits, could fall into idle ways so easily. But it is always a bore to him now when he has to go down to New York at term time. Once or twice he has had a coolness with his partners because he failed to go at all. I shouldn't be surprised if he gave New York up altogether. He talks often of it—of practising at Tecumseh instead. Oh, and that reminds me. You can tell. What relation does Tecumseh bear to this place? I know they have some connection in his mind, because he spoke once of the 'pull'—whatever that may mean—being a Tecumseh lawyer would give him here. I know they are not in the same county, for I looked on the map. Whatever it is, that would be his purpose in going there, I am curious to learn. You know," she added, with a

smile and tone pathetic in their sarcasm, "a wife ought to be interested in whatever concerns her husband."

"They are in the same Congressional district," Seth replied. "There are three counties in the district, Dearborn (where we are now), Jay, which lies east of us, and then Adams, which is a long, narrow county, and runs off South of Dearborn. Tecumseh is away at the extreme southern end of Adams county. Perhaps that is what you have in mind."

"It is what *he* has in mind," she said.

"But how does Albert fill his time here—what does he do?"

"In about equal parts," she made answer, lifting her eyes again, with the light of a little smile in them now, "he reads novels here in the house, and drives about the neighborhood. What time he is not in the easy-chair upstairs, devouring fiction, he is in his buggy on the road. He won't let me have anybody up from New York, even of the few I know, but he has developed a wonderful taste for striking up acquaintances here. He must by this time know every farmer for twenty miles around. First of all, in buying his stock when he took the farm, he spread his purchases around in the queerest way—getting a cow from this man, a colt from another, a pig here and a bull there. Milton and he went together, and they must have driven two hundred miles, I should think, collecting the various animals.

"I didn't understand it at first, but I begin to now. He wanted to establish relations with as

many men here as he could. And the farmers he invites here to dinner—you should see them! Sometimes I think I shall have to leave the table. It's all I can do, often, to be decently civil to them, rough, vulgar men, unwashed and untidy, whom he waylays out on the road and brings in. He thinks I ought to exert myself to make them feel at home, and chat with them about their wives and children, and ugh! call on them and form friendships with them. But I draw the line there. If he enjoys bringing them here, why I can't help it; and if he likes to drive about, and be hail-fellow-well-met with them, that is his own affair. But——”

She stopped, and Seth felt that the silence was eloquent. He began to realize that his pretty sister-in-law was in need of sympathy, and to rank himself, with indignant fervor, on her side.

Annie Fairchild came in. Seth had seen and spoken with her several times, during the period of his father's death and funeral, but hurriedly and in the presence of others. Her appearance now recalled instantly the day of the fishing trip—a soft and pleasant memory, which during his year's exile had at times been truly delicious to him.

The women thought of it too, now, and talked of it, at Seth rather than to him, and with a playful spirit of badinage. As of old, Isabel did most of the talking. Annie had become quite a woman, Seth said to himself, as she took off her hat, tidied her hair before the glass, and laughingly joined in the conversation. She talked very well, too, but

she seemed always to think over her words, and there appeared to be in her manner toward him a certain something, intangible, indefinite, which suggested constraint. He could feel, though he could not explain, it.

During his stay in Tecumseh he had seen almost nothing of the other sex. There were often some young women at the boarding-house, but he had not got beyond a speaking acquaintance at the table with any of them, in the few instances where his shyness had permitted even that. His year in a city had improved him in many ways. He could wear good clothes now without awkwardness; he spoke readily among men, and with excellent choice of language; he knew how to joke without leading the laughter himself. But he had had no chance to overcome by usage his diffidence in female company, and he had not been quite at ease in his mind since Annie came in. She seemed to make a stranger of him.

He thought upon this, and felt piqued at it. He wondered, too if he was not sitting clumsily in his chair—if it was not impolite in him to cross his legs. Gradually, however, he grew out of his reserve. It dawned upon him that Annie was timorous, nervous, about the impression she was making on him, and that Isabel listened with real respect and deference to what he had to say. He grew bold, and took the lead of the conversation, and the two women followed meekly. It was a delightful sensation. He said to himself: "It is the easiest thing in the world,

once you make the plunge. I could talk with women now in the finest drawing room in the land." He sat back in his chair, and told them some anecdotes about Mr. Samboye, from which somehow they gathered the notion that he was at the best co-ordinate in rank with Seth. They were more than ever proud of their relative, who had so rapidly conquered a high and commanding position for himself in that mystic, awesome sphere of journalism. Seth expanded and basked in this admiration.

He had heretofore found the evenings on the farm stupidly tedious. To sit at the big table till bed time, reading by the light of a single kerosene lamp, or exchanging dry monosyllables with Albert, offered a dismal contrast to the cheerful street lamps, the bright store-windows, the noise and gaiety and life of the places of evening resort in Tecumsch. But this evening revealed a far more attractive side of country life than he had known before. Annie stayed after tea, and the three played dominoes. Albert seemed somewhat out of sorts, but they did not mind his silence in the least. They chatted gaily over their games, and time flew so merrily and swiftly, that Seth was surprised when Annie said she must leave, and he discovered that it was a quarter to ten.

"How pleasantly the evening has passed," Isabel said, and smiled at him, and Annie answered, "Hasn't it! I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much—" and she, too, smiled at him.

The old walk over the fields, down the poplar

lane, to see Annie home—how like the old times it seemed! And yet how far away they were! Sometimes in these bye-gone walks, as they came up now in Seth's memory, he and Annie had been almost like lovers—not indeed, in words, but in that magnetic language which the moon inspires. It occurred to neither of them to saunter slowly, now. They walked straight ahead, and there were no “flashes of eloquent silence.” Their conversation was all of Isabel.

“Not as happy as she expected!” said Annie, repeating a question of Seth's; “you can't guess how wretched she is! Sometimes it's all she can do to keep from breaking down. I am literally the only person she has to talk to, that she cares about, week in and week out. Albert is away a great deal. I don't think he is much company when he *is* home. She did try, when she first came, to make some acquaintances round about, among the well-to-do farmers' wives. But she couldn't bear them, and they said she was stuck up, and so *that* came to nothing. She doesn't get on at all with Aunt Sabrina, either. Poor girl! she is so blue at times that my heart aches for her. Of course she wouldn't let you see it. Besides she has been ever so much more cheerful since you came. I *do* hope you will stay as long as you can—just for *her* sake.”

She added this explanation with what sounded to Seth's ear like gratuitous emphasis. The disposition rose swiftly within him to resent this.

“You are very careful,” he said, “to have me un-

derstand that it's for her sake you want me to stay." Then he felt, even while the sound of his voice was in the air, that he had made a fool of himself.

His cousin did not accept the individual challenge.

"No, of course we are all glad to see you. You know we are. But *she* specially needs company; it's a mercy to her to have somebody to brighten her up a little. Really, I get anxious about her at times. I try to run over as much as I can, but then I have grandmother to tend, you know."

"How is the old lady, by the way? And oh—tell me, Annie, what it was that all at once set her against me so. You remember—the day before we went fishing, and Isabel saved my life."

The answer did not come immediately. In the dim starlight Seth could see that his cousin's face was turned away, and he guessed rather than saw that she was agitated.

"I will tell you," she said at last, nervously, "why grandmother—or, no, I will *not* tell you! You have no right to ask. Don't come any further, I am near enough to the house now. Good night."

She had hurried away from him. He watched her disappear in the darkness, then turned and walked meditatively home.

He was not so sure as he had been that it was easy to understand women.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. RICHARD ANSDELL.

IT was no light task to spend a vacation contentedly on the farm. There were thousands of city people who did it, and seemed to enjoy it, but Seth found it difficult to understand how they contrived to occupy themselves. What work on a farm meant, he knew very well; but the trick of idling in the country was beyond him. It was too hot, in these July days, for driving much, and besides, Albert rarely invited him into the buggy when the grays were brought around to the step. The two brothers saw little of each other, in fact. It was not precisely a coolness, but Albert seemed to have other things on his mind beside fraternal entertainment. The old pastime of fishing, too, failed him. In the renovation of the house his fine pole and tackle had somehow disappeared, and he had no money wherewith to replace them. He had entered upon his vacation unexpectedly, at a time when he happened to be particularly short of cash—and there was something in Albert's manner and tone which rendered it impossible to apply to him, even if pride had not forbidden it.

There was, it is true, the increasing delight of

being in Isabel's company, but alongside this delight grew a doubt—a doubt which the young man shrank from recognizing and debating, but which forced its presence upon his mind, none the less—a doubt whether it was the part of wisdom to encourage too much of a friendship with his sister-in-law. This friendship had already reached a stage where Aunt Sabrina sniffed at its existence, and she hinted dimly to Seth of the perils which lurked in the lures of a citified siren, with an expression of face and a pointedness of emphasis which clearly had a domestic application. There was nothing in this, of course, but the insensate meddlesomeness of a disagreeable old maid, Seth said to himself, but still it annoyed him.

More serious, though, was his suspicion—lying dormant sometimes for days, then suddenly awakened by a curt word or an intent glance—that Albert disliked to see him so much with Isabel. Often this rendered him extremely nervous, for Isabel had no discretion (so the young man put it to himself) and displayed her pleasure in his society, her liking for him, quite as freely in her husband's presence as when they were alone. There was nothing in this, either, only that it made him uneasy. Hence it came about that, just when one set of inclinations most urgently prompted him to stay about the house, another set often prevailed upon him to absent himself. On these occasions he generally walked over to Thessaly, and chatted with John.

“John and I have so much to talk about, you

know, being both newspaper men," he used to say, with a feeling that he owed an explanation of some sort to Isabel. "And then I can see the daily papers there. That gets to be a necessity with a journalist—as much so as his breakfast."

"I scarcely dare to read a paper now," Isabel once replied. "It drives me nearly mad with longing to get back among people again. I only read heavy things, classic poetry and history—and then, thank Heaven, there is this embroidery."

It was at John's, or rather on the way there, that Seth met one day a man of whom he was in after life accustomed to say, "He altered the whole bent of my career." Perhaps this was an exaggerated estimate of the service Richard Ansdell really rendered Seth; but it is so difficult, looking back, to truly define the influence upon our fortunes or minds by any isolated event or acquaintance, and moreover, gratitude is so wholesome and sweet a thing to contemplate, and the race devotes so much energy to civilizing it out of young breasts, that I have not the heart to insist upon any qualification of Seth's judgment.

Mr. Ansdell at this time was nearly forty years of age, and looked to be under thirty. He was small, thin-faced, clean-shaven, dark of skin and hair, with full, clear eyes, that by their calmness of expression curiously modified the idea of nervousness which his actions and mode of speech gave forth. He was spending his fortnight's vacation in the vicinity, and he was strolling with his friend the school-teacher,

Reuben Tracy, toward the village when Seth overtook them. Seth and Reuben had been very intimate in the old farm days—and *here* was a young man to the latent influence of whose sobriety of mind and cleanliness of tastes he never fully realized his obligation—but since his return they had not met. After greetings had been exchanged, they walked together to the village, and to the *Banner of Liberty* office.

It was the beginning of the week, and publication day was far enough off to enable John to devote all his time to his visitors. There was an hour or more of talk—on politics, county affairs, the news in the city papers, the humors and trials of conducting a rural newspaper, and so forth. When they rose to go, John put on his hat, and said he would “walk a ways” with them. On the street he held Seth back with a whispered “Let us keep behind a bit, I want to talk to you.” Then he added, when the others were out of hearing:

“I have got some personal things to say, later on. But—first of all—has Albert said anything since to you about the farm?”

“Not a word.”

“Well, I have been thinking it all over, trying to see where the crookedness comes in—for I feel it in my bones that there *is* something crooked. But I am not lawyer enough to get on to it. I’ve had a notion of putting the whole case to Ansdell, who’s a mighty bright lawyer, but then again, it seems to be a sort of family thing that we ought to keep to our-

selves. What do you think?—for after all, it is mostly your affair.”

“I can't see that Albert isn't playing fair. It must be pretty nearly as he says—that he has put as much money in the farm as it was worth when he took it. It's true that father's will leaves it to him outright—and that wasn't quite as Albert gave us to understand it should be—but Albert pledges us that our rights in it shall be respected, and it seems to me that that is better than an acknowledged interest in a bankrupt farm would be, which we hadn't the capital to work, and which was worthless without it.”

“Perhaps you are right.” John paused for a moment, then began again in a graver tone: “There's something else. How are you getting on on the *Chronicle*?”

“Oh, well enough; I get through my work without anybody's finding fault. I suppose that is the best test. A fellow can't do any more.”

“That is where you are wrong. ‘A fellow’ can do a great deal more. And when you went there I, for one, expected you were going to do a deuced sight more. You have been there now—let's see—thirteen months. You are doing what you did when you went there—sawing up miscellany, boiling down news notes, grinding out a lot of departments which the office boy might do, if his own work weren't more important. In a word you've just gone on to the threshold, and you've screwed yourself down to the floor there—and from all I hear you are likely

to stay there all your life, while other fellows climb over your head to get into the real places."

"From all you *hear*? What do you mean by that—who's been telling you about me?"

"That you shan't know, my boy. It is enough that I *have* heard. You haven't fulfilled your promise. I thought you had the makings of a big man in you; I believed that all you needed was the chance, and you would rise. You were given the chance—put right in on the ground floor, and there you are, just where you were put. You haven't risen worth a cent."

"What do you expect a fellow to do? Get to be editor-in-chief in thirteen months? What could I do that I haven't done? There have been no vacancies, so no one has climbed over my head. I've done the work I was set to do—and done it well, too. What more can you ask?"

Seth spoke in an aggrieved tone, for this attack seemed as unjust as it had been unexpected.

John replied, "Now keep cool, youngster! Nobody expected you to get to be editor-in-chief in thirteen months, so don't talk nonsense. And I am not blaming you for not getting promotion, when there have been no vacancies. What I do mean, if you want to know, is that you have failed to make a good impression. You are not in the line of promotion. Workman doesn't say to himself when he thinks of you 'There's a smart, steady, capable young man on whom we can count, who's able to go as high as we are able to put him.' No! instead of

that he says—but no, never mind. I don't want to hurt your feelings."

"Oh, you are mighty considerate, all at once," retorted Seth, angrily. "Go on! Say what you were going to say! What is it that Workman says, since you've been spying on me behind my back?"

"Now you are talking like a fool," said the elder brother, keeping his temper. "I haven't been spying on you. I have only been commenting on facts which have come to my knowledge without seeking and which were brought to me by one who has your interests at heart. I have only been talking to you as I ought to talk, with the sole idea of benefiting you, helping you. If you don't want to hear me, why I can shut up."

Seth did not reply for a minute or so; then he growled moodily: "Go ahead! Let's hear it all."

"The 'all' can be said in a few words. You have been wasting your time. I grant that you have done your work well enough to escape blame—but what credit is there in that? a million mechanics do that every day. Instead of improving yourself, elevating and polishing yourself, by good reading, by studying the art of writing, above all by choosing your associates among men who are your superiors, and from whom you can learn, you have settled down in a Dutch beer saloon, making associates out of the commonest people in town, and having for your particular chum that rattle-headed loafer Tom Watts. Do you suppose Mr. Workman doesn't

know this? Do you suppose he likes it, or that it encourages him to hope for your future?"

Seth was silent longer than ever, this time. When he spoke it was to utter something which he instantly regretted: "I haven't been able to gather from your old friends that you were altogether a bigot, yourself, on the subject of beer, when you were my age."

Fortunately John did not get angry; Seth honestly admired and envied his elder brother's good temper as he heard the reply:

"That's neither here nor there. Perhaps I did a good many things that I want you to avoid. Besides, there was nothing in me. I am good enough as far as I go, but if I had worked on a daily paper till my teeth all fell out, I should never have got any higher than I was. With you it is different; you can go up to the head of the class if you are a mind to. But the beer saloon isn't the way—and Tom Watts isn't the guide."

"He is the only friend I have got. What was I to do? It is easy enough to talk, John, about my knowing good people and all that, but *how*? That is the question? It isn't fair to blame me as you do. All the men like Workman and Samboye—I suppose you mean them—hold themselves miles above me. Do you suppose I've ever seen the inside of their houses or of their club? Not I! You dump a young countryman in a strange city, new at his work, without knowing a solitary soul—and then you complain because he gets lonesome, and makes

friends with the only people who show any disposition to be friendly with him. Do you call that fair play?"

o "Well, there's something in that," John replied, meditatively. "Some time I'm going to write a leader on the organized indifference of modern city society to what becomes of young men who deserve its good offices and drift into beer saloons because they are not forthcoming. It would make the *Banner* immensely solid with orthodox people."

"You wouldn't have wanted me to go to the Young Men's Christian Association, I suppose?"

"No-o, I don't know that I would. I don't know, after all, that you could have done much differently. But you've done enough of it, do you understand? You have served your time; you have taken your diploma. It is time now to quit. And I can put you on to a man, now, who will help you on the other tack. Do you see Ansdell, ahead there?"

"Yes;—is he the man who told you about Workman and me?"

John ignored the question. "Ansdell is one of the cleverest men going; he's head and shoulders over anybody else there is in Tecumseh, or in this part of the State. For you to know him will be a college education in itself. He is more than a big lawyer, he is a student and thinker; more than that, he is a reformer; best of all, he is a man of the world, who has sown more wild oats than would fill Albert's new bins, and there's not an atom of nonsense about him. He knows about you. We've

talked you over together. He understands my idea of what you ought to be, and he can help you more than any other man alive—and what is more he will.”

“It was he who told you about me, wasn’t it?” Seth persisted.

“If you will know, it was and it wasn’t. All he said was that he had heard Workman speak of you; that he had got the idea from his tone that you were not making the most of your opportunities; that he thought this was a great pity; and that if he could be of any use to you he would be very glad. That is all—and not even your sulkiness can make anything but kindness out of it.”

This practically ended the dialogue, for the others had stopped to let the brothers come up, and John shortly after left the party.

The three men had a long stroll back to the hill-side road, with a still longer lounge on the grass under the elms by the bridge. Seth watched and listened to this swarthy, boyish-looking mentor who had, so to speak, thrust himself upon him, very closely, as was natural. Did he like him? It was hard, he found, to determine. Mr. Ansdell was extremely opinionated. He seemed to have convictions on almost every subject, and he clung to them, defended them, expanded them, with almost tearful earnestness. His voice was as strong and powerful as his figure was diminutive; he talked now chiefly about the Tariff, which he denounced with a vibrating intensity of feeling. Seth knew nothing about

the Tariff, or next to nothing, but he admired what Ansdell said, mainly because it was said so well. But he grew quite enthusiastic in his endorsement when he heard his Editor, Mr. Samboye, used as a typical illustration of the dishonesty with which public men treated that question. After that he felt that it would be easy to make friends with Mr. Ansdell.

CHAPTER XVI.

DEAR ISABEL.

IT was the last day but one of Seth's vacation on the farm. He was not sorry, although the last week, by comparison, had been pleasant enough. He had seen a good deal of Mr. Ansdell, who interested him extremely, and who had come for him three or four times for long walks in the fields. He sat now in the living room near Isabel, dividing his attention between her and his book—one of Albert's innumerable novels. The desultory conversation mixed itself up with the unfolding work of fiction so persistently that he presently gave over the attempt to read, and drew his chair nearer to his sister-in-law. It was raining outside, and wet weather always made her want to talk. She said:

"Tell me, Seth, if you have noticed any change in Alvira."

"No, I can't say that I have. In fact, she seems to me the one person about the place who has *not* altered a bit."

"See what eyes men have! Why, she has grown ages older. She goes about now muttering to herself like an old, old woman. And the way she looks at one, sometimes, it is enough to give one the

chills. I tell Albert often that I am almost afraid to have her in the house."

Seth chuckled audibly, in good-natured derision. "What a mountain out of a mole hill! Why Alvira has glared at people that way, with her little black-bead eyes, ever since I was a boy. She doesn't mean anything by it,—not the least in the world. The trouble is, Isabel, that you let your imagination run away with you. You are desperately lonesome here, and you amuse yourself by conjuring up all sorts of tragic things. You will have Aunt Sabrina a professional witch next thing you know, and Milton a mystic conspirator, and this plain old clap-boarded farm house a castle of enchantment."

He had never before assumed even this jocose air of superiority over his blond sister-in-law, and he closed his sentence in some little trepidation lest she should resent it. But no, she received it with meekness, and only protested mildly against the assumption underneath.

"No, I am sure there is something in it. She is brooding about Milton. Not in any sentimental way, you know, but it used to be understood, I think, that they were to marry, and now he carries himself way above her. Why, I can remember, as long ago as when I visited here that summer, when we were all boys and girls and cousins together, I heard your mother say they would make a match of it some time. But now he avoids the kitchen and
◦ her. It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it, for me to be speculating in this way about the love affairs of the

servants. But you are driven to it here. You have no idea how grateful one gets to be, here in the country, for the smallest item of human gossip."

Seth was still considering whether it was possible for him, in careful language, to suggest his own—or rather the Lawton girl's—view of the Milton-Alvira affair, when Isabel spoke again:

"Speaking of gossip, there is something I have been tempted half a dozen times to mention to you—something I heard almost every day during the little time that the women round-about were calling on me. You will guess what I mean—the talk about you and Annie."

Seth did not immediately answer, and she continued:

"Of course, you know, Seth, that I wouldn't speak of it if I thought it would be distasteful to you. But I know it used to be the idea that you two were marked for each other. I have heard ever so much about it since we have lived here. And yet you don't seem to me to be at all like lovers—hardly even like affectionate cousins. I think she has rather avoided the house since you have been here, although that, of course, may be only imagination. She is such a dear, good girl, and I am *so* fond of her, but still I can hardly imagine her as your wife. You don't mind my speaking about it, do you?"

Seth was still at a loss what to say, or, better, how to say it. While she had been speaking the contrast between the two young women, which had been

slumbering in his mind for a year, had risen vividly before him. The smile, half-deprecating, half-inviting, with which she looked this last question at him, as she laid the everlasting embroidery down, and leaned slightly forward for a reply, gave the final touch to his vanishing doubts.

"Mind *your* speaking about it? No, no, Isabel." He scarcely knew his own voice, it was so full of cooing softness. "I am glad you did—for—for who has a better right? No, there is nothing in the gossip. Our people—my mother, her grandmother—had it in mind once, I believe, but Annie and I have never so much as hinted at it between ourselves. Ever since mother's death old Mrs. Warren has, however, taken a deep dislike to me—you remember how she forbade Annie to go with us on that fishing trip—but even without that——"

"Ah, I shan't forget that fishing trip," Isabel whispered, still with the tender smile.

"Nor I, you may be very sure." The caressing tone of his voice sounded natural to him now. "As I was saying, even if we two young people had once thought of the thing, I fancy it would be different now, anyway. *Then*, I was going to be a farmer. *Now*, of course, that is all changed. My career is in the city, in circles where Annie would not be at home. She is a dear, good girl, as you say: nobody knows that better than I do. But you must admit she *is*—what shall I say?—rural. Now that I have got my foot on the ladder, there is no telling how far I may not climb. It would be simply suicide to

marry a wife whom I perhaps would have to carry up with me, a dead weight."

The youngster was not in the least conscious of the vicious nonsense he was talking. In the magnetic penumbra of Isabel's presence his words seemed surcharged with wisdom and good feeling. And the young woman, too, who was four years his senior, and who should have known better, never suspected the ridiculous aspect of the sentiments to the expression of which she listened with such sweet-faced sympathy. We *are* such fools upon occasion.

"Besides, there is no reason why I should think of marriage at all, for a long time to come—at least not until I have made my way up in my profession a bit. When the time does come, it will be because I have found my ideal—for I have an ideal, you know, a very exalted one."

He looked at her keenly, blushing as he did so, to discover if she had caught the purport of his words; then he addressed himself, with an absence of verbal awkwardness at which he was himself astonished, to making it more clear.

"I mean, Isabel, that my brother has won a prize which would make anything less valuable seem altogether worthless in my eyes. If there is not another woman in the world like my brother Albert's wife, then I shall never marry."

"Brother Albert's wife" looked up at the speaker for an instant—a glance which seemed to him to be made of smiles, sadness, delight, reproach and many

other unutterable things; then she bent over her work, and he fancied that the pretty fingers trembled a little between the stitches. There was a minute of silence, which seemed a half hour. At last she spoke:

"Does your brother impress you as being a particularly happy man? I won't ask a similar question about his wife."

Seth found it necessary to stand up, to do this subject justice. "No!" he answered. "He doesn't deserve such a wife. But because one man is incapable of appreciating a treasure which he has won, it's no reason why another man shouldn't—shouldn't say to himself 'I will either marry that kind of woman or I'll marry none.' Now, *is* it, Isabel?"

"Perhaps this wife is not altogether the treasure you think she is," the young woman answered, with the indirection of her sex.

Seth found words entirely inadequate to express his dissent. He could only smile at her, as if the doubt were too preposterous to be even suggested, and walk up and down in front of her.

Still intent upon her work, and with her head inclined so that he saw only a softened angle of face beneath the crown of glowing light-hued hair, she made answer, speaking more slowly than was usual with her, and with frequent pauses:

"I don't think you know all my story, though it is a part of your family's history on both sides. You remember my father—a sporting, horse-racing man of the world, and you know that my mother died

when I was a baby. You knew me here, one summer, as a visiting cousin, and we played and quarrelled as children do. Now you know me again as your brother's wife—but that is all. You know nothing of the rest—of how my father, proud about me as he was common in other things, kept me mewed up among governesses and housekeepers in one part of the house, while his flash companions rioted in another part; of how my wretched, chafing girlhood was spent among servants and tutors, with not so much as a glimpse of the world outside, like any Turkish girl; of how, when your brother, because he was a cousin, did become the one friend of my father's who might be invited into the drawing room, and be introduced to me, and took a fancy that he would like to marry me, I welcomed even such a chance for emancipation, and almost cried for joy; and of how I woke up afterward—no, this is what you do not know." There was a considerable pause here. "And I do not know why I tell this to you now, except that I want you to understand."

"I *do* understand, Isabel."

As a matter of fact he did not understand at all, but he thought he did, which, for present purposes, came to the same thing.

"And you can realize," she went on, "how I feel at the thought of staying here the rest of my life—or, even if we go elsewhere—of having my life mapped out for me without any regard to my wishes and aspirations, while you are just pluming your wings for soaring, and can fly as high as you like with no

one to gainsay you. Oh, what it must be to be a man!" She was looking up at him now, with enthusiasm supplanting the repining in her eyes. "And you love your work, so, too! You are so clever and capable! You can be anything you like in your profession—and it is impossible that I should ever be anything that I want to be."

A month ago, when he first came to the farm, this calm assumption of his ability to carve whatever part he desired out of the journalistic cake would have fallen upon Seth like cruel and calculated sarcasm. As it was, he winced a little under its exaggeration, but the substance pleased him. He squared his shoulders unconsciously as he answered:

"Well, I am only at the threshold as yet, but if there is any such thing as doing it, I am going to push my way on. It doesn't seem so easy always, when you are right in the thick of the fight, but now, after my rest here, I feel like an eagle refreshed. I am full of new ideas and ambitions. I owe a good deal of it to Ansdell, I suppose. You never saw such a fellow for making everybody believe as he does, and take an exalted view of things, and long to be doing something great. John prescribed him to me as a doctor would some medicine, and I took him more or less under protest, but I feel immensely better already."

Isabel took only a languid interest in the inspiring qualities of this prodigy, and reverted to her own grievance:

"Yes, you will go and conquer your position. I

will stay here and count those miserable poplars across the road—did you ever see a more monotonous row?—and work anti-macassars for no one to see, and mope my heart out. Why, do you know, I haven't one single correspondent!"

The full enormity of the situation thus revealed was lost upon Seth, who had never written more than half-a-dozen letters in his life, and did not see why people who did not have to write letters should want to do so. But he said "Indeed!" as compassionately as he could.

"No, not one. I did think you might have taken pity on me, but for all the year that you have been away, I have never heard a word from you."

"I wrote once or twice to Albert," Seth answered, tentatively, to occupy time until he could turn around in his mind the immense suggestion involved in this complaint.

"Yes, and I used to hear at the breakfast table—'Oh, by the way, Aunt Sabrina, Seth sends his love to you and Isabel—' only this and nothing more! What is the good of having a literary man in the family, if he doesn't write you long, nice letters?"

The vista which had flashed itself before Seth's mental vision was filled with dazzling light. He could not mask the exultation in his voice as he asked:

"Do you really want me to write to you?"

"You ought not to have waited to be asked," she said, smiling again. "Yes, you shall write me—and long letters too, mind—as often as you like." She

added after a moment's pause, in which both had been turning over the same idea, "You needn't be afraid of writing too often. The bundle from the post office always comes to me in the morning, hours before *he* gets downstairs. Dana brings it up when he comes back from the cheese-factory, and it never goes into any one's hands but mine. Beside, henceforth I shall watch for it all the more carefully."

Next morning Seth prepared once again to leave the homestead, but this time with a light heart and a gay demeanor. A month's absence had served so to remodel his views of the *Chronicle*, that he already felt himself to be a personage of importance, in its control. He had been constantly spoken of in the village as "one of the editors" of that journal, and found so much pleasure in the designation that he had come to use it in thinking of himself. He felt himself fired, too, with new enthusiasm and power by his talks with Ansdell, and he believed, not only that he saw where his past errors had lain, but that he knew now the trick of success. Above all, he was to write long letters to Isabel, and receive answers equally long and nice from her, and—this gave him an especial sense of delight—it was all to be a secret between them.

The sun shone brightly, too, after the rain, as if to be in harmony with his mood. Albert was more affable than he had been before, and after breakfast, and while the carriage was being brought around,

gave him some cigars for the journey, and a \$20 bill for pocket money. These were pleasant preludes to a little brotherly conversation.

“I wish you would hurry up and get to have a say on the *Chronicle* as soon as you can, Seth,” said the lawyer, holding him by the lappel in fraternal fashion. “You can help me there, help me very materially. I am going to be nominated for Congress in this district next year—don’t whisper about it yet, but I’ve got it solid. I haven’t let any grass grow under my feet since I moved here, and they can’t beat me in the Convention. But the *Chronicle* can do a good deal in the election, and I look to you for that. I am not going to Washington without knowing my business after I get there. There is a big thing on hand, big for me, big for you too. Good-bye now, my boy; I must get upstairs to my writing. You won’t forget!”

No, Seth promised, very cordially and heartily, he would not forget.

When his traps had been piled again into the carriage, and he said good-bye to his Aunt and to Alvira, no Isabel was to be seen. She had been at breakfast, but had subsequently disappeared. Seth went into the living room—no one was there. He opened the door to the stairs and called out her name—no answer. As he closed the door again, he heard the faintest tinkle imaginable from a piano key. He had not thought of the parlor, which was ordinarily unused, but he hastened to it now. Isabel stood at the instrument, her head bowed; her finger still

pressing the key. She turned with a dear little exclamation, which might be either of surprise or satisfied expectancy, and held out her hand.

“So you *wouldn't* go, after all, without saying good-bye to me!”

“Why, Isabel, you know better!” answered Seth, still very downright for his years. He was actually pained at her having fancied him capable of such a thing, and while he held her hand, he looked at her with mild reproach in his eyes.

“Oh, do I?” she answered, rather inconsequently. Then she sighed, and bowed her fair head again. “Have you given it a thought at all—how lonely it will be after you are gone for—for those who are left behind? I can't bear to think of it—I came in here because I couldn't stand and see the horses at the door, and the preparations for your going. It is as if the tomb door were swinging back on me again. I am foolish, I know—” here the words were much hampered in their flow by incipient sobs—“but if you could realize my position—the awful desolation of it, the—the—” She broke down altogether, and, with the disengaged hand, put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Seth had never seen a young and beautiful woman in tears before, off the stage, but his racial instincts served him in the emergency. He gently took her hand down again, holding them both, now, in his. He told her, again surprising himself by the smoothness and felicity of his words, how delightful she had made his visit, how deeply he prized her

sympathy and compassionated her lot, and how the pangs of regret at parting were only solaced by the thought that she had permitted him to write. Then he kissed her—and hurried out to the carriage.

The handsome, high-bitted grays made short work of the drive to Thessaly station, where John was waiting to have a parting word, so that Seth scarcely had time to collect his thoughts and settle accounts with himself, before the train started. Three hours later when he got off at Tecumseh, he had progressed no further in his work of striking a moral balance than :

“After all, she is my cousin as well as my sister-in-law.”

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UPWARD LEAP.

“WHAT man of achievement cannot recall some one short period of his life which seems to transcend in significance and value all the rest of his career—when great things for which he had only unconsciously waited came to him without the asking; when the high court of events rendered its sudden, unexpected verdict of success, without costs to him who had never made a plea; when the very stars in their courses seemed to have privily conspired to fight for him? How swift, inexplicable, even amazing it all was! And yet how simple too! And when the first flush of astonishment—half delight, half diffidence—had passed, how natural it all seemed; how mind and manners and methods all expanded to meet the new requirements; how calmly and as a matter of course the dignity was worn, the increment appropriated, the mental retina adapted to the widened focus! How easily, too, he sloughed off his own conviction that it was all pure luck, and accepted the world’s kind judgment of deserved success! Who is it that accuses the world, and rails at its hardness of heart? What man among us all, in the hour of honest introspec-

tion, does not know that he is rated too high, that he is in debt to the credulity, the generosity, the dear old human tendency to hero-worship, of his fellows?"

This is an extract from a letter which the successful Seth Fairchild wrote a few months ago. Chronologically, it is dated only a couple of years after the occurrences with which we are now concerned—but to him an interval of decades doubtless seemed to separate the periods. Perhaps the modesty of it is a trifle self-conscious, and the rhetoric is of a flamboyant kind which he will never, apparently, outgrow, but at all events it shows a disposition to be fair as between himself and history. The period of great fortune, to which he alludes, is to be glanced at in this present chapter—to be limned, though only in outline, more clearly no doubt than he himself could be trusted to do it. For, though a man have never so fine a talent for self-analysis, you are safe to be swamped if you follow him a step beyond your own depth. In cold fact, Seth could no more tell how it was that, within one short year, he rose from the very humblest post to become Editor of the *Chronicle*, than Master Tom here can explain why he has outgrown his last summer's knickerbockers while his twin brother hasn't.

He had been back at his work in Tecumseh only a month when word came to the office one morning that Mr. Tyler could not come—that he had been seriously injured in the havoc wrought by a runaway horse. It was too early for either editor or

proprietor to be on the scene, and Arthur Dent at that hour was the visible head of the staff. He and Seth had scarcely spoken to each other for months—in fact since that disagreeable evening encounter—but he walked over now to our young man's desk and said :

“ Mr. Fairchild, you would better take the News to-day. Tyler has been badly hurt.”

Marvelling much at the favoritism of the selection, for Dent had not only passed Murtagh over but had waived his own claims of precedence, Seth changed desks. He got through the work well enough, it appeared, but he mistrusted deeply his ability to hold the place. Mr. Samboye did not seem to approve his promotion, though he said nothing, and the manner in which Mr. Workman looked at him in his new chair seemed distinctly critical.

After the paper had gone to press, and some little routine work against the next morning's start was out of the way, he wavered between idling the remaining two hours away among the exchanges, or attempting an editorial article for the morrow, such as Mr. Tyler occasionally contributed. His former experience with Mr. Samboye dismayed him a bit, but he concluded to try the editorial experiment again. Some things which Ansdell had said one day on the Silver question remained in his mind, and he made them the basis of a half-column article. He was finishing this when the office-boy told him Mr. Workman wished to see him below. He took his Silver article with him, vaguely hoping, hardly ex-

pecting, to be congratulated on his day's work, and told to keep the desk.

Seth's impressions of his employer were that he was a hard, peremptory man, and he searched his face now for some sign of softness in vain. Mr. Workman motioned him to a seat, and said abruptly :

"You were on the News desk to-day. Did you take it yourself, or were you sent there?"

"Mr. Dent told me to take it, sir."

"Why didn't he take it himself, or put Murtagh on?"

Seth had it in mind to explain that Murtagh did not come down early enough, but he remembered how strenuous the rules were in the matter of matutinal punctuality, and concluded to say simply that he didn't know. Mr. Workman looked at him for a moment, made some arabesque figures with his pencil on the edge of the blotter, looked at him again, and then said, in a milder tone than Seth had supposed his voice capable of :

"I may as well be candid with you. I have been very much disappointed in you so far. You haven't panned out at all as your brother led me to expect you would."

This was a knock-down blow. Poor Seth could only turn his copy about in his hands and stammer : "I am very sorry. In what way have I failed?"

"It would be hard to tell exactly in what way. I should say it was in a general failure to be the sort of young man I thought you were going to be. You

have shown no inclination, for example, to write anything—and yet your brother praised you up to the skies as a writer.”

“But what was the good? I did write a long paragraph when I first came here, and handed it in to Mr. Samboye, and he tore it up before my eyes! That would be enough to discourage anybody!”

“Oh, he did that with you too, did he?” Mr. Workman made more arabesques on his blotter, shading them with great neatness.

Seth thought this was a favorable opportunity to get in his Silver article, and handed it to the proprietor with a word of explanation. Mr. Workman read it over carefully and laid it aside without a syllable of comment. There was nothing in his face to show whether he liked it or not. He surrounded all his penciled figures with a wavy border, and said again:

“Then there are your associations. Before ever you came I was discouraged at the amount of money and time and health my young men were squandering in saloons. It had become a scandal to the town. I get a young man in from the country, whose habits are vouched for as perfect, with an idea that he will influence the rest, and lo and behold! he becomes the boss guzzler of the lot!”

“There is a good deal of justice in that, Mr. Workman—or there was. But since I’ve been back this time it has been changed. I have moved into another boarding house where I have a room to myself, and I have read at home almost every evening when

I was not with Mr. Ansdell. I think I see the folly of that old way, as clearly as any one can."

"Ansdell and I had a long talk about you the other day. It was he who gave me my first idea that there was anything in you. He is something of a crank on certain subjects, but he knows men like a book. I have been saying to myself that if he liked you there must be more in you than I had discovered. If I am right in this, now is your time to show it. It is a toss up, the doctors say this afternoon, whether poor Tyler lives or dies. In any case he won't be about in months. You can keep on at the desk for a while. We'll see how you make it go."

The next afternoon, when the inky boy brought up the damp first copies from the clanging, roaring region of the press, Seth was transfixed with bewilderment at seeing his article in the position of honor on the editorial page. While he still stared at it, amazed and troubled, Mr. Samboye with an angry snort swung around in his chair to face him:

"Is this Silver thing yours?"

"Yes."

"And it is your conception of the ethics of journalism, is it, to sneak leaders into the composing room without authority?"

"I sneaked nothing in! I gave the copy to Mr. Workman last night. I am as much surprised to see it the leader as you are."

Mr. Samboye rose abruptly, and strode through the room to the stairs. They were rickety at best

and they trembled, the whole floor trembled, under his wrathful and ponderous tread.

The fat-armed foreman, who was in on his eternal quest for copy, had heard this dialogue. He grinned as the Editor slammed the door below, and chuckled out "He'll get his comb cut now. The boss ordered your thing to be the leader himself."

Mr. Samboye presently returned with his broad face glowing crimson, and seated himself at his work again in gloomy silence. He made more erasures than usual, and soon gave it up altogether, taking his hat and stick with an impatient gesture, and stamping his way out.

Time went on. The luckless Mr. Tyler died, and Seth became confirmed in his place. He had developed more strongly, perhaps, than any other one trait, the capacity for system, and he was able to so remodel and expedite the routine work of the News desk that he had a good deal of time for editorial writing. His matter was never again given the place of honor, but it came to be an important and regular feature of the page. He worked hard on the paper—and almost equally hard, by spells, at home evenings. He did drop in at Bismarck's or some like place, for a few moments now and then, but he was careful to avoid games, or any further intimacy with habitués. Had it not been for Ansdell and Dent, this part of his new regimen would have been well nigh impossible, for the gregarious instinct was strong in him—as it is in any young man worth his salt—and associations of some sort were as necessary

as food to him. He had discovered, long before this, that Dent was an old acquaintance of Ansdell's, and that he, in fact, had told the latter about Seth and his profitless courses, and interested the lawyer in his case.

He had learned, too, that this pale "Young Man Christian" as Watts had called him derisively, had from the first been well-disposed toward him, and, when the emergency of Tyler's absence came up, had waived alike his own claims to preferment and his justifiable personal pique, and thrust Seth forward into the place because he felt that he needed some such incentive to make a man of himself. This was very high conduct, and Seth tried hard to like Dent a great deal in return. He never quite succeeded. They were too dissimilar in temperament to ever become close friends. Seth explained it to himself by saying that Dent was too cold and non-emotional. But Dent himself never seemed conscious of anything lacking in their relations, and they were certainly cordial and companionable enough when they met, generally two evenings a week, at Mr. Ansdell's chambers.

Nothing less like the bachelor's den dear to tradition can be imagined. There were no pipes, for the lawyer smoked cigars and nothing else; there was no litter of papers, opened books, pamphlets, scraps and the like, for he was the soul of order; no tumbled clothes, odd boots, overflowing trunks, etc., for he was the pink of neatness. He used to like to describe himself in the words with

which Evelyn paints his father, as "of a thriving, neat, silent, methodical genius," but it was always with a twinkling eye, for surely no man was ever less silent. He was a born talker—nervous, eager, fluent, with a delicate sense of the sound and shading of words, a keen appreciation of all picturesque and salient points, a rare delight in real humor, and, above all, with tremendous capabilities of earnestness. Conceive such a man, if you can—for there will never be another like him—and then endow him in your mind with a marvelous accumulation of knowledge, with convictions upon every conceivable subject, and with nothing short of a passion for enforcing these upon those of whom he was fond—and some idea of the perfect ascendancy he gained over Seth will have been obtained.

Mr. Ansdell was neither impeccable nor omniscient. There was much in both his theories and his practice which would not commend itself to the moral statutes of the age; he attempted no defense, being incredulous as to the right of criticism upon personal predilections. But he had a flaming wrath, a consuming, intolerant contempt, for men who were unable to distinguish between private tastes and public duty. On this subject of public duty he was so strenuous, so deeply earnest, that often there seemed but a microscopic line between his attitude and fanaticism. But this zeal had its magnificent uses. Often it swayed despite themselves the politicians of his party who had least in common with him, and who disliked him and vaunted their con-

ventional superiority to him even while they were being swept along toward nobler purposes than their own small souls could ever have conceived, in the current of feeling which his devotion had created.

He took complete possession of Seth's mind, and he worked wonders upon it. There is neither room here, nor power, to analyze these achievements. The young man, heretofore through circumstances slow and mechanical, revealed under the inspiration of this contact his true temperament. He became as receptive as a sensitized plate in the camera. He seemed to take in facts, theories, emotions, prejudices, beliefs, through the very pores of his skin. He found himself hating one line of public action, and all its votaries, vividly; he found himself thrilling with violent enthusiasm for another line, and its exponents—such an enthusiasm as exiled men tremble under when they hear the national air of their native land.

He was not always right. Very often indeed he did injustice, in his mind, and in the types as well, to really well-meaning men who after their lights were just as patriotic as he was. He condemned with undue ferocity where he could not unreservedly praise, and, like most men of three-and-twenty who sit on the tripod of judgment upon their fellow mortals, he made many mistakes. But his mental and moral advance, despite these limitations, was tremendously swift, and, in the main, substantial. No man ever made the world budge an inch ahead who had not well developed the capacity for indig-

nation at weak and wrong things. This indignant faculty grew and swelled in Seth's nature like a strong vine, spreading upon the tree of his admiration for his ideals.

He had a fair income now—twenty dollars a week—and he lived very well, having a room in a good house, and taking his meals down town. This was a condition of life which had always commended itself to his imagination, and he revelled now in realising it. Of course he saved no money. Through Ansdell and others he had made the acquaintance of a number of Tecumseh men of position, and he had been asked a little to their houses, but he had not gone more than once. This single experience did not dismay or humiliate him; he flattered himself that he came out of it with credit. But it did not interest him; it was wofully difficult to talk to the women he met—to know what to say to them. It was the easier to come back from this one excursion to his old Bohemian bachelor notions, and justify them to himself.

The correspondence with Isabel had not been altogether so attractive as he had anticipated. It had its extremely pleasant side, of course, but there were drawbacks. She wrote well, but then most of her writing was about herself, which grew wearisome after a time. It was difficult too, to find time to answer her letters always when the philandering mood was upon him, and in this matter he found himself curiously the creature of his moods. The routine of daily newspaper toil had rendered him

largely independent of them in his ordinary work. He wrote about as well one day as another. But there were seasons when he could not write to Isabel at all. Then he would say to himself that the need of doing so was a nuisance, and in this frame of mind he would generally end by reproaching himself for even entertaining the idea of a mild flirtation with his brother's wife. Not that there was anything wrong in it, of course; he was quite clear on this point; but it was so useless, such a gratuitous outlay of time and talent!

But then next day, perhaps, a good dinner, or a chance glimpse of fresh romance in the exchanges, or some affecting play at the theatre of an evening, would bring back all the glamour of her pretty, tender face, the magic of her eyes, the perfume of her tawny hair. And then he could write, and did write, often with a force of sweet rhetoric, a moving quality of caressing ardor, which it is difficult to distinguish from love making.

To him these letters did not mean that at all; they were really abstract reflections of the sentimental side of his nature, which might have been evoked by almost any likable, intelligent woman.

But to the wife on the farm they seemed deeply, deliciously, personal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOLTING THE TICKET.

It was the year of a great political revival—coming none too soon.

It is a part of the history of human progress that grand moral movements, once they have fulfilled their immediate purpose, swing backward to the establishment of some new abuse. The net gain is, no doubt, century by century, continuous. But to those who look for episodic interest rather than epochal meaning the march of the race must often seem crab like—as when a Henry VIII utilizes a reforming revolt to crush and plunder a vast system of benefaction, and create a hard-fisted, commercial plutocracy with one hand, while calling into existence with the other a permanent class of starving poor; or when a Bonaparte makes the waning impetus of a democratic uprising serve his imperial ambition, and converts the legions of the Republic into the guards of a Cæsar.

So, in our own time, in our own country, craft and greed had climbed to the control of a great organization, baptized in the name of Freedom and excited still with the thoughts of its tremendous achievements, and diverted its forces to the service of base ends.

This ignoble mastery had not gone unchallenged. More than one revolt against it had given promise, for a little, of success. But each in its failure had but repeated the familiar experience of yeomanry against trained troops, of sporadic, scattering popular impulses against the cool, consecutive plans of organized power. But it is the fate of despotisms, whether of a man or of a machine, to by excesses sap their own foundations. There came a time when the political usurpers who, through the listlessness of some citizens, the ancient prejudices of others, the mean lust for profit and place of still a third class, had attained power, went just a step too far.

As this is a romance, and not a political history, it is permitted to avoid both dates and any details which might seem to fix a particular occurrence, and ask the reader to conceive that the crisis grew out of the manner in which these politicians obtained control of an imaginary but important Convention—that they bribed delegates, that they forged telegrams to secure a majority for themselves on the organizing committee, and that they made drunk the poor tool they had selected for Chairman and locked him in his hotel room that he might not escape them. It strains credulity to assume all this, I know, but its acceptance is essential to the story. Fortunately it is less difficult to credit the corollary—that the decent people of the State, led by an honest press, rose *en masse* and pulverized this machine at the following election.

It was at the outset of this crisis that Seth

became Editor of the Tecumseh *Chronicle*. The young man had been, it need scarcely be said, deeply interested in the events which led up to it, and when the first of the party papers came out frankly, the morning after the Convention, refusing to support its nominations, he was in a tremor of delight. He scarcely dared hope that the *Chronicle* would follow their lead, but still he did hope. Mr. Samboye remained downstairs in consultation with Mr. Workman longer than usual on that eventful forenoon. They were settling the policy of the paper, of course, and the young news editor, perfunctorily weeding out copy for the "first side," was conscious all the while of being eagerly anxious to know what this policy was to be.

Mr. Samboye presently came up, took his seat without the ordinary prelude of conversation, and began writing. He finished his article, still without a word to any one, and took it down to Mr. Workman. He was absent but a few moments. On his return Seth asked him :

"Do we bolt the ticket?"

Before he could answer, a telegraph boy came running up the stairs (this one actually did run) with a dispatch for Mr. Samboye. The editor opened and read it in a puzzled way at first, then more carefully and with a light of comprehension on his broad face. He folded the telegram up carefully, put it into his inner vest pocket and said to Seth :

"No, we occupy a picturesque position on the top rail of the fence."

The editor did not seem quite himself that day. He stayed about the editorial room instead of going out to lunch, until the leader proof was ready, and then he asked to read it himself, instead of letting it go in the ordinary course to the proof-reader. He made a good many corrections on it, which was unusual for him. Finally, about half-an-hour before the paper went to press, he took his departure, saying briefly to Seth that he would not return that day.

Two hours later the office boy summoned Seth to the counting-room below. Mr. Workman sat alone at his desk, with the day's *Chronicle* spread out before him, and with the original proof-sheet of the leader in his hand. He motioned Seth to close the doors, and to take a seat close beside him.

"You have read this leader?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"I shouldn't like to say all that I think of it."

"Neither should I," replied Mr. Workman with an iron-clad smile. He was very pale, and Seth scented a storm in the manner in which the grim smile faded from his face after an instant of hovering, as a gleam of wintry sunshine passes off the snow. "There's a story—a very curious story—back of this leader. I only know part of it; perhaps you can help me to get at the rest."

Not knowing what to say, Seth remained silent.

The proprietor continued: "When this leader left my hands this morning, it bolted the ticket, out and

out. There was no mistake about it. It was square-footed. As it is now, it's neither fish, flesh nor fowl. It condemns the Convention and the frauds, but it practically says that the result must be accepted. The worst of it is I didn't see the paper until the edition had been worked off. The alterations in the proof here, which make all the difference between white and black, are in Samboye's hand. Did he say anything to you about it? Was anybody up in the editorial room to see him?"

"No one came up to see him; he said nothing to me except that we were on the fence. That disgusted me so much that I asked nothing further."

"Did he say that when he came up from here—or later, after he had gone over the proof?"

"He said it when—or no, hold on—he received a dispatch just before;" and Seth recounted the episode of the telegram.

Mr. Workman was much impressed with this. He covered his blotter thick with scrolls and geometrical figures while he pondered it. At last he spoke.

"You don't know where the telegram came from?—no, of course not. I think I know about where, and I think I can guess about what it said. It said that, in this matter of bolting tickets, one day's delay might make an immense amount of difference, and that it would be worth his while to keep the *Chronicle* non-committal in its first issue by hook or by crook. Take my word for it, that is what it said in substance. The fellows who sent it were scared about the *Chronicle*. They knew what an

effect its course would have on the weeklies, most of which go to press to-morrow. They couldn't spend money better than in having us accept the ticket, and not only commit ourselves but the country editors—and *they've bought Samboye!*”

There was a long silence. The two men looked at each other. Finally Workman said:

“The worst feature of it is, there is no way of getting at the thing—of proving it. I suppose I could get an order compelling the Company to produce the telegram, but I am not sure, and then it would be a big scandal and a big expense.” He lapsed into pencil work again and sighed.

“But is Samboye that kind of man?” asked Seth.

“Oh yes, I have no illusions on that score. I very nearly caught him in a thing of this sort—on a smaller scale, of course—three years ago.”

“But why then——”

“Why have I kept him? You were going to ask. Well, he is a good man in his way. He is an immensely clever writer, if you don't care much for solid argument, and do care for decorative stuff, with a good deal of fun, and epigram, and big words. People used to talk about his articles. I suppose hundreds of people buy the *Chronicle* just to read them. Well, we will have to lose those people, and all the others who will quarrel with us for bolting the ticket. For she's going to be bolted! So you better go to bed early to-night, and eat raw meat for breakfast, for we want a leader to-morrow that will make their hair curl.”

"Do you mean—" began Seth in a flutter of strange excitement.

"Yes, you will have to take hold. Samboye shall never show his face in that room again. That's settled! I may get somebody else, later—we'll see. But you can carry it along for a time, can't you?"

"I'll try—but I am afraid——"

"You needn't be afraid. In a campaign you simply want straightforward, red-hot, to-the-point writing. It is the rest of the year, when one must write general matter, that pulls on a man. Besides, Ansdell will help you out, if you need him. Oh, yes, and that reminds me—your brother Albert didn't show to very good advantage in that Convention. He might easily have made a better beginning in politics than that. From all accounts he had the Dearborn County delegates in his pocket, and, although these other scandals have diverted attention from it, I think the way they ratted over was about the worst thing in the whole affair."

"It wasn't nice, for a fact," said Seth.

"I haven't had it mentioned in the paper, mostly on your account. But I am not so clear about keeping silent next week, when the Congressional Convention comes up. Your brother, I suppose, has Dearborn County solid for his own candidacy. But here in Adams County the delegates are for Ansdell—and of course he is our sort of man. I don't think much of a party paper interfering before the nomination is made, but this may be a case where it will be necessary—especially if Abe Beekman, up in Jay

County, tries any of his funny work. However, it will be time enough to cross that bridge when we get to it. Meanwhile, say not a word to anybody, in the office or out of it, about what has happened. Just go ahead with the work, and pay attention to no one."

There was no scandal. Mr. Samboye took his punishment quietly, and left Tecumseh shortly afterward, ostensibly on a long vacation. There was some little gossip, but no whisper of the actual facts in the case.

Seth surprised himself by the excellence and evenness of his work in the new position. Probably he will never do better or stronger writing than he did in this his first campaign. For one thing, it is doubtful if any political contest can ever again appeal to his enthusiasm, and stir all his emotions to the glowing point of ardency, as this one did. In one sense his new position was embarrassing, for a number of the old time readers of the *Chronicle* refused to support it now against their party, and some of them said very disagreeable things about the youngster rattling about in Samboye's shoes. But there was another class, a larger class it seemed to him, who shared his enthusiasm, and, in their excited admiration for the course of the paper, heaped praises upon him even beyond his deserts. So he worked on, writing almost the entire page daily, coming down early in the morning and staying long after the paper was out, and giving scarcely a thought to the outside world.

He had barely seen Ansdell since his promotion. He felt an even greater sense of loss in this than he would have done under ordinary circumstances, for the tremendous mental outpouring to which he was daily subjected made him almost famished, at times, for food in the form of conversation with this man who, of all others, most sympathized with him.

But there was a difficulty in the way—of which Seth's sensitiveness made, no doubt, a great deal too much. The fight for the Congressional nomination in the district was attracting attention all over the State, and, as evil luck would have it, Seth's brother was pitted against Seth's dearest friend. It was no ordinary contest, in which a man could with ease maintain a friendly neutrality. Everywhere the struggle in the Thirty-sixth District was regarded as a sample conflict, as embodying in itself all the features of the larger issue between the machine and the people. Albert Fairchild had identified himself so thoroughly with the party organization, and had played so prominent a part in the scandals which provoked the revolt, that his cause was distinctly that of the politicians; while Ansdell was just as distinctively the representative of the independent and rebellious element. In no other district of the State were the lines so clearly drawn.

It was a fortnight or so after Seth's assumption of the editorship that the District Convention was held—at the little village of Tyre, some dozen miles from Thessaly, up in Jay County. The *Chronicle*

had taken no part in the contest. No one doubted that its sympathies were with Ansdell, but still it had not said so. The night before the Convention Mr. Workman advised Seth to write to his brother, warning him that if he were nominated the *Chronicle* could not support him.

“So long as we are in the bolting business, we might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb,” said the proprietor.

It was not a pleasant task, but Seth performed it as graciously as he could.

There was no news from Tyre next day save that Mr. Beekman of Jay was also a candidate, and that the Convention was in a deadlock. The second day, along with the news announcement that the Convention, after seventy-odd fruitless ballots, had adjourned for a week, came a despatch from Albert begging Seth to visit the farm for a couple of days, and talk the thing over, before the *Chronicle* took action. Upon consultation with Mr. Workman Seth replied that this was impossible, owing to the necessities of his work.

Then there came a letter from Albert, brief, but very much to the point.

“DEAR BROTHER: I am sorry if your work must suffer by your coming to me, but I think I have a claim upon you superior to even that of the *Chronicle*. If I have not, I ought to have. I decline to believe that, if you represent the matter to him as really imperative, my former friend, Mr. Workman, will place any obstacles in your way. But if he

does I still insist that your choice between him and me must be a final one. I do not write a word to you about gratitude. I simply say, be here at the farm on Sunday—or never again.

“ALBERT.”

After this there was nothing to do but for Seth to telegraph that he would come.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WELCOME.

WHEN Seth walked over from the Thessaly station, Sunday forenoon, to the farm, he was not, it may be imagined, in a placid frame of mind. There lay before him an interview with his brother which could not, in the nature of things, be pleasant, and which might very easily be distinctly unpleasant. It was his duty to say sundry things to Albert which were not in themselves nice, and if Albert was still in the mood shown forth by his peremptory letter, these remarks would very likely produce a scene. Seth was in no sense afraid of his brother, nor had the thrifty thought that this brother was a rich, childless man, to offend whom would be a gratuitous economic blunder, ever entered his head. The youngster had no faculty whatever for financial prudence. But he was grateful—almost ridiculously grateful—by nature. The trait is not a rare one, even in these days when a new civilization has substituted for individual patronage and beneficence the thanks-to-nobody trade-unionism of universal conceit and rivalry, but it was abnormally developed in the youngest of the Fairchilds.

He said to himself, as he crossed the fields toward

the white and red land-mark of house and barns on the side hill, that he owed everything in the world to this brother. Whatever there might be in his public attitude to condemn, however pernicious his politics might be, still it was his fraternal feeling and generosity which had created the vast gulf between Seth the plow-yokel and Seth the editor. These reflections brought no comfort to the young man.

Some perverse agency whispered to him, as he strode along over the stubble, that after all he had never really liked Albert; and this liberality of his, too, might it not be a mere cheap mess of pottage, thrown to Seth to console him for the loss of his rights in the farm? John had always been incredulous as to Albert's true goodness in this matter; might there not be something in these suspicions? Seth tried manfully to combat these ungenerous doubts, but they forced themselves upon his mind.

Then there was Albert's treatment of his wife! Seth had never been clear as to the exact nature of Isabel's grievance against her husband. No specific allegation of cruelty or neglect, much less of infidelity, had ever been laid by her at Albert's door in his brother's hearing. Indeed, so far as Seth's observation went, Albert had always appeared to be a decent enough sort of husband, complaisant even if somewhat indifferent, and acquiescent to the verge of weakness, in her whims. He seemed to refuse her nothing, in the matter of having her own way, and if he most often broke the ruling conjugal dumbness by satirical comments on her actions and opin-

ions, he at least never seriously attempted to fetter either. This sounded like the description of a tolerable husband, as husbands go. But up against it was to be set Isabel's plaintive, pitiful, persistent assertion of unhappiness with him. And clearly she ought to know what her husband was like a good deal better than an outsider could.

So the arguments did battle in Seth's mind, as he climbed the last fence, and felt his feet on ancestral soil. He had now only to cross a short stretch of pasture land to be at his journey's end.

Perfect silence rested on the farm. The fat cows lay lazily about him, comfortably chewing the cud of sweet aftermath; the cluster of bright, neat buildings fell into picturesque lines of composition before him, in the soft, hazy sunshine of Indian summer. The background of scarlet and ochre and deep purple-browns in the woods beyond, of warm mauve hills and pale, fluffy clouds above; the shaggy old horse, standing in tranquil bliss, with his head over the fence; the aged shepherd-dog stretched asleep on the kitchen door-stone in the sunny distance—all brought to him a sense of content and beauty which warmed his heart and calmed his thoughts. The spell of the peaceful, restful scene soothed him. Then, as by magic, the whole picture seemed to take on the charm of Isabel's presence. "I am to see her!" he said aloud, almost exultantly.

There had been no special pleasure in this prospect, a few hours before. Indeed, it had been months since he had been conscious of a genuine desire to

meet his sister-in-law. At times of late it had even seemed to him that a meeting would be a source of embarrassment, just as the necessity of keeping up the clandestine correspondence presented itself often to him in the light of a bore.

But now—yes! she was walking forth swiftly to meet him—coming over the grass with a gliding haste which had a wealth of welcome in every motion. The very genius of the mellow, warm-hearted season she seemed to his eyes as she advanced, clad in some soft, indefinite stuff, loose-flowing, and that in tint under the red noon sun could be the shadow on golden grain, or the light on dark puce grapes, or the dim, violet haze over the distant valley. She was near him now, beaming with unaffected delight, reaching out her hands in greeting—and his heart went to meet her.

“Oh, Seth! How good of you to come!”

She had almost thrown herself into his arms, and had stood upon tiptoe to be kissed. He held himself back from the embrace, but he did kiss her, and he swung her hands now in his, looking into her glowing eyes with tender, responsive intentness, and smiling his joy. This reception did make him very happy, but he had also a great uneasiness lest some of the folks should be observing them from the windows of the house.

She divined his thoughts, and said, gayly: “They are all at church!”

“What? Albert too?” Seth knew that his brother was not of a religious turn; but he swiftly

bethought himself, and added "Oh, I forgot that election is coming on."

"No," she chirruped, springing along by his side, her arm tight in his, her walk reflecting exultantly her emotion, "he is in New York. He will be back to-morrow. He has telegraphed me to have you wait." She dropped into a mock-serious tone: "That is, of course, if you would *like* to wait?" She looked up archly: "Do you much mind waiting?"

"Do I *mind*!" He could only look his delight. His voice trembled.

She made a tiny skip, and lifted her face to him again, radiant with happiness. "Do you know," she said, "I could run and jump like any little child, I am so wild with joy! It seems such an age since we were together last! Only letters—but they were very nice, though. You dear boy, who taught you to write such pretty letters——?"

He pressed her arm closer in his. "Who taught me everything that is sweet?" he whispered. It was all very delicious, but still it troubled him.

They entered the house, and he excused himself while he took his hand-bag up to his old room, and made his toilet after the long hot walk. As he occupied himself thus, and brushed his novel beard, his thoughts were much perturbed. It was very far from his ideas to make love to his brother's wife. This bald statement of the situation which framed itself now in his mind, almost for the first time, repelled and alarmed him. Yet it seemed to sum up the state of affairs fairly. If there was not love-

making in every feature of that meeting out on the lawn, then his conceptions of the tender passion were all at fault.

“By Jove, it mustn't come to that!” he said to himself. “A fellow ought to be able to be fond of his sister-in-law, and be pleasant to her, and sympathize with her and all that, without going beyond the bounds, and making a scoundrel of himself.”

And it was with a deep resolution to be careful, and watch all his words, that he descended the stairs. He had taken out of his valise two front pages of a Sunday newspaper, containing “Jeff Brigg's Love Story,” which he had saved a while before for Isabel, and he gave them now to her.

“Here is something I cut out for you, Isabel; it is a very pretty story, and I know you will like it.”

“Oh, how sweet of you! How well you know just what will please me most of all! And you shall read it to me! The other stories you have sent me were only moderately nice, because I had to read them by myself, but this—oh! this will be enchanting!”

She arranged an easy chair—a low, capacious chair with light blue the dominant color in its covering—close beside the window in the parlor which overlooked the poplars, and seated herself in it. Seth brought a hassock for her feet, and then put his own chair along side, where he could see her, and still get a good light on the print. It was not easy for him to begin the reading, so great was the fascination of looking at his companion. The sunlight

flared upon the white curtains above her, and its reflections glowed back again from her crown of golden braids, luminous against the azure of the chair, and tipped with soft radiance her rounded profile, in cameo-relief against the deep olive of the poplars. Isabel was an artist.

He made a beginning at last, and read until the democrat-wagon drove up in the yard, with its load of church-goers. She made a little mouth at the interruption.

“I suppose Sabrina will come in now, and dinner will be ready soon. But afterwards we can be quiet again, for she always reads the Bible in her own room Sunday afternoons.”

All through the cold dinner, despite the necessity of answering Aunt Sabrina's and Milton's remarks, Seth found his mental vision fixed on that beautiful profile against the leafy background; especially sweet was the portrait when the eyes were closed, and the lovely fullness above the lids, as in the face of a Madonna, was revealed in the wavering light.

The story was not to be finished that afternoon, for Elhanan Pratt and his daughter dropped in almost before the meal was finished, and a little later Annie Fairchild came. There was not even much consolation in the pretty grimaces expressive of discontent which Isabel from time to time, when the visitors were not looking, confided to Seth. It was a very dull afternoon.

The venerable Mr. Pratt, a weazen, verbose little

“gentleman-farmer,” who wore a huge black satin stock over his high flaring collar opening behind, and remained clean-shaven, in pious memory of Henry Clay and the coon campaign, sat on the edge of his chair and droned commonplaces by the hour. He evidently had an axe to grind by his visit, and he was much disappointed by Albert's absence. But if he could not see “the coming Congressman,” as he called him once or twice, and sound that new political magnate as to his own renomination for the Assembly, he could at least enjoy the monopoly of a long conversation with the Editor of the *Tecumseh Chronicle*, and impress that young man with the breadth and value of his views. So Seth was forced to spend three dreary hours, answering as briefly as might be, listening wearily, and stealing stray glances at the three young women, who made a brighter group on the other side of the parlor stove. Once or twice he tried tentatively to engraft himself upon their conversation, and choke old Elhanan off, but the solemn little bore relentlessly brought him back to the dry bones of politics. Thus it happened that he had barely had an opportunity of exchanging a word with his cousin Annie, when she stood up and said, “I must be going.”

He walked over to her now, and put his hand in a brotherly way on her shoulder, as he helped her on with her cloak.

“I've scarcely had a word with you, Annie,” he said, smiling. “How is your grandmother? I

needn't ask how *you* are. You grow prettier every day. And how do you get on with your school?"—for the girl was now teaching in the district school house over the hill.

She answered, "Oh, grandmother is about the same; perhaps a little weaker, but as bright mentally as ever. You are looking well, Seth, and quite the man now. Your beard becomes you—doesn't it, Isabel? We are so sorry you can't come to-morrow night. We see so little of you since you have become a city man."

"Sorry that I can't come!" repeated Seth after her. "Come where?"

Isabel interposed with a ready explanation. "There is to be a husking over at Crump's to-morrow evening—the first of the season. There will be a big party of young people, and Crump sent over by Annie an invitation for us. But I have explained that you are here on business, which may very likely occupy you to-morrow evening, and that in any case you would have to write your leaders for the next day's paper. We are ever so sorry, Annie," she added, turning to the school-teacher now, "but you know this is a terribly busy time with Seth, and we mustn't think of letting our little country sociables interfere with his work. Some time, soon, he will come for a real vacation, instead of a flying business trip, and then we can monopolize him—and we will, too, won't we, Annie?"

Annie smiled, a little faintly, as if her heart were not altogether in it, and replied, "Yes, to be sure

we will." She added, to Seth, "I won't say good-bye. I suppose I shall see you again."

He assented, and went to the door with her, and stood on the steps watching her as she walked away in the autumn dusk. Decidedly she *was* a pretty girl!

The Pratts, father and daughter, consented upon the shadowiest suggestion of an invitation to stay and partake of the picked-up Sunday tea, and that involved their spending the evening. Aunt Sabrina came in, and the talk was dreary and general. So "Jeff Briggs" and his amatory affairs went over to the morrow.

In the morning Seth walked over to Thessaly and saw John. The interview depressed him. John had had some idea of following the *Chronicle's* lead, and bolting the State ticket, but the county politicians had bullied him out of the thing by threatening the destruction of the job-printing business connected with the *Banner of Liberty*, and the boycotting of the paper itself. All his inclinations, too, were toward Ansdell in the Congressional race; but Albert had loaned him some money, and, beside, he couldn't see his way clear to disregarding, openly at least, the fraternal tie. He was consequently in a savage mood.

"I'm thinking of taking out the head-line of the paper this week," he growled, with a sardonic humor, "and putting in instead a cut of a runaway slave, with a bundle over his shoulder, which is in the job-room here, left over from the days when there was

slavery in New York State, and masters used to advertise in the old paper for fugitives. '*Banner of Liberty*' indeed! By heaven, it ought to be '*Banner of Bondage*!' "

There was no comfort or profit in discussing the situation, either general or local, with John. He neither knew nor cared, he swore, what Albert's chances were to dissolve the deadlock on the morrow. He might or he mightn't; it was all one to him, and apparently to the party, who were the ——!

Seth left John to his bad temper and language, and returned to the farm in the afternoon. A telegram from Albert awaited him.

"New York, Oct. 19.—If possible conclude business, home to-night, at latest to-morrow morning. Wait for me at all hazards.—ALBERT."

To provide against a possible delay over Tuesday, Seth devoted the afternoon, and the earlier part of the evening, to writing matter for his paper, which Dana was to convey to Thessaly for the early morning train, when he went to the cheese-factory. If Albert was coming at all that night, he would arrive about eight.

Nine o'clock came. Aunt Sabrina, after sitting in stern silence by the living-room stove for an hour or two, looking at the wall-paper as her brother Lemuel had been won't to do, went up to bed with a frigid "good night." The farm people had all retired with the chickens, long before.

Scarcely raising his eyes from his writing, Seth remarked:

‘How Aunt Sabrina has failed since I left the farm! She grows ever so much like father. Poor old woman, she was so eager to have Albert come here, so elated with the idea that the family was to be restored to social and political dignity again—and now the apples seem to be all dead-sea fruit to her. I can’t see that she takes the slightest interest in Albert’s campaign. Odd, isn’t it?’

Isabel was sitting near the stove, around the corner of the table from him. The reddish radiance reflected down from the shaded lamp fell upon her rounded chin and her smooth white neck, dainty in tint as the ruffle in which it lost itself. Above this lace at the back, as she bent over her embroidery, some stray curling wisps of hair gleamed like gold in the light. She replied:

“It isn’t that at all. She’s interested enough in the Congress idea, or would be if she hadn’t something else on her mind. The prying old piece found out, by quizzing Dana, about our writing to each other. She has got it into her ridiculous old head, I feel sure, that there is something between us. Didn’t you notice the way she eyed us at the dinner table yesterday?”

Seth did not answer. His article was unfinished, but he suddenly found himself in doubt whether it was not already long enough. He reflected, or tried to reflect, for a moment, while the soft tones of her voice murmured in his ears, then added a sentence which might serve as a conclusion, and scrawled a dash underneath.

“There! I’m through!” he said, and looked up.

Her eyes were fixed upon his face. They were in the shadow of the tinted lamp-shade, but they had a light of their own—a languorous, alluring glow. He had never looked into such eyes before; they fascinated him, and he knew, in a delicious trembling, that his own were answering them in kind.

“You can read to me now,” she said, the rapt, wistful gaze melting into a smile. “He will not come to-night.”

Seth took the story, as she gave it to him from her workbox, and glanced over it to pick up the thread of the narrative where it had been dropped. As he was still thus engaged, he felt her hand laid upon his, and, as their eyes met again, heard her low, soft voice murmur:

“Do you know why I declined our invitation for the husking?”

There was a silence, which the young man felt that his face made full of acquiescent meaning.

She answered her own question: “I wanted you here, all for myself.”

Seth lost himself in an uplifting, floating sensation of ethereal beatitude. Her hand was in his now, warm and palpitating, and he raised it to his lips. It was difficult to breathe, but the oppression in his breast was all delight. He rose to his feet, his arms outstretched, his heart beating in exultant tumult. He heard her whisper—he could scarcely see her for the magnetic waving before his eyes—the refrain of

the story : " So strong and yet so gentle ! " His lips were formed for the passionate utterance—already framed in his heart—" My darling ! " when there came the sound of footsteps on the path without, and of a hand upon the latch.

Seth mechanically took up the manuscript of his article, and turned toward the door. Beneath an impassive mien, far more composed than he dared to hope, there was the sensation of being hurled down, down, through the air, to unwelcome earth.

It was Albert. He looked at the two cursorily but closely, and only said, as he tossed his bag into a chair :

" Train was late. You go to bed at once, Isabel. I have particular business with Seth."

CHAPTER XX.

THE NIGHT: THE BROTHERS.

ALBERT seemed in an amiable mood as, divesting himself of his outer garments, he drew up a chair by the fire, offered Seth a cigar from his case and lighted one himself. He examined Seth's face by the flame of the match, as the latter lighted his cigar, and appeared to be satisfied with the inspection.

"Sit down here," he said pleasantly. "I want a good long talk with you. It was too bad to keep you waiting so long, but there was no help for it. I couldn't see the people in New York that I wanted to see until to-day, and it was only by good fortune that I caught the train as it was. Then we were delayed on the road, of course. If an engineer on this one-horse line should ever get a train through on time I believe he'd have a fit, just from the shock of the thing. And then I had to wake up the man at the livery stable in Thessaly—fancy his being asleep at eight o'clock!—and he would only bring me as far as the foot of the hill, because he had been up to a dance all the previous night. But of course, in my position now, running for office, I couldn't complain. Beside, I ought to be used to

all these little delights of rural existence by this time."

Albert stretched his feet out comfortably on the rail of the stove, and leaned back in his chair with an air of enjoyment. He had been growing very stout this past year, Seth noticed, and the bald spot on his crown had visibly spread. He seemed unwontedly good-natured too—a natural and proper accompaniment to increasing obesity.

"But all this has nothing to do with my asking you to come here, has it? Did Workman raise any objections to your coming?"

"No, of course not, after he read your letter."

The lawyer smiled complacently: "I thought that letter would fetch him. Of course, my boy, the harshness of the letter was for effect on him, not on you. It simply gave you a chance to say you had *got* to come."

Seth did not find himself wholly clear on this point, but he nodded assent. Albert looked at him, and seemed a trifle annoyed at having the conversation all to himself, but he went on after a moment's pause, speaking now with good humored gravity:

"First of all, I ought to tell you how proud I have been of your fine progress on the *Chronicle*. I doubt if there is another young man of your age in the State who has done so much climbing in so short a time. I take a real satisfaction in thinking that you are my brother. I can't tell you how often I say to myself: 'Albert Fairchild, the best

thing you ever did in your life, or ever will do, was to give that boy a chance.' ”

This was gall and wormwood to the young man. He had almost succeeded in regaining the composure so abruptly scattered by Albert's unexpected arrival. The fluttering agitation came back now, and brought with it a painful sense of shame and self-reproach as Albert's words recalled the scene which his entrance had interrupted. Seth did not look his brother in the face, but murmured some commonplace of gratitude. He was glad that there was a red shade on the lamp; it might conceal his flush of humiliation.

Albert went on: “But you were not invited here so peremptorily just to hear this. Brotherly pride and affection are things that don't need words—that can be taken for granted—are they not?”

Seth tried to smile, and said, “Yes, of course they are.”

“Well, youngster, I am taking them for granted in your case. Mind, as I said in my letter, I am not saying a word about gratitude. I don't want the thing to be put on that footing at all. Brothers ought to be able to help each other, and all that, without lugging in the question of gratitude. I am talking to you as one man should to another who bears the same name, and was of the same mother. By George! poetry, isn't it? Well, the point is this. The time has come when you can help me, help me immensely. I am not in this fight for myself alone. Personally I care very little about going

to Congress. But I have got the family to consider, and I am in a position now where I can make a ten-strike for it. A good deal of it I have created myself. These countrymen up here in Dearborn County fancy they are shrewd politicians, but it has taken me, almost a novice in politics, less than two years to get the whole machinery right under my thumb. It's in the blood, I tell you! There wasn't another manager in this whole section that could hold a candle to the old Senator, in his day,—and if he could keep track of things now I imagine he'd admit that his grandson was no slouch."

Albert chuckled quietly at the slang word, the expressiveness of which pleased him, and at the vision of the satisfaction of the departed ancestor which it suggested. He proceeded:

"I can't tell you all my plans, but I am in a big combination. I have made use of my large connections as a lawyer in New York to arrange some things which would open your eyes if you knew them. It is all settled that I am going on to a Committee which will be worth while, I can tell you. And then, once started in the thing, with my grandfather's name back of me, there is no telling where I may not climb. A name that has figured in the blue book as ours has is a tremendous power. The Republic derides heredity, but the public believes in it. It is human nature, my boy. And in this rehabilitation of the family name you have as much concern as I have—in fact more than I have—for you will enjoy even more than I shall the fame and

wealth I am going to get out of this thing, for the family."

"Where does the wealth come in, Albert? There is no money honestly to be made in politics." Seth had forgotten his earlier embarrassment now, and the spirit of dispute was rising within him.

"My dear fellow," said the elder brother, comfortably contemplating the rings of cigar smoke he was making, "to the wise there is money everywhere. The word 'honesty' in politics is a purely relative term, just as it is in your line, or in law, or in medicine. If we lawyers strictly graded our charges by the net value of our services to our clients, if doctors refused to make all calls upon patients that were not altogether necessary, and based their bills rigidly upon the actual good they had done—by George! the poor-houses would have to be enlarged. Take your own business, for instance, or I ought to call it a profession, too, I suppose. Are editors invariably candid with their readers, do you think? Do they always tell the disagreeable truth about people they make their money from? And don't they have an open hand behind the back about the same as other folks do? Occasionally, I admit, an ass like our brother John does drift into the profession, and retains his childhood belief that the moon is made of green cheese. But I have noticed that such fellows as he, who run their papers on an exalted moral plane, generally come around to borrow money from the ungodly, toward the close of the year, to make their accounts balance. I am

sorry to see that John and Ansdell have filled your head with all this nonsense. A newspaper man tearing his shirt in defense of financial fastidiousness in politics presents rather a comical spectacle, if you only knew it."

"You have no right at all to say that!" Seth answered hotly. "I believe firmly that the newspaper men of this country, considering their influence and the great temptation to make money out of it, are as honest a body of men as you can find in America. This conventional talk about their venality is the cruellest kind of libel, and if you knew them as I do you wouldn't lend yourself to circulating it."

"Oh, I am not entirely without acquaintance in this white-winged profession of yours," replied the lawyer, smilingly. "I know Mr. Mortimer Samboye, for example. I could tell you too, you confiding youngster, just his figure, and where the cheque, made payable to his wife, was cashed."

"If you do know about Samboye, you know what I believe to be the one exception to the rule in the State. I don't for a moment believe that there is another editor whom your people could have bought. It is an odious exception, to be sure, but exceptions prove the rule. If journalists and journals were in the market, as you and your machine friends seem to imagine, there would be no such widespread bolt against your machine ticket to-day."

"Oh, you think so, do you?"

The lawyer was getting vexed. He stood up,

thrust his hands deep into his trowsers pockets, and spoke with more sharpness than before.

“You think so! Why, man alive, this same d—d *Chronicle* of yours has been in the market since before you were born. I bet you to-day that Workman would rather plank out five thousand dollars from his own pocket than let me cross-examine him in the witness box on his recollections of the *Chronicle's* record. Why, that is the very last paper in the State that has a title to throw stones! Do you want to know when this new reforming zeal of Workman's was born? I can tell you. It was the day that another man (Dick Folts, if you wish names), was appointed to the Territorial Governorship that Workman wanted for his brother. So you thought it was only high morality and noble patriotic sentiments that ailed the *Chronicle*, did you? You never suspected that it was simply a bad case of brother—that it all happened because Samuel M. Workman of Toboggan was compelled to continue to adorn a private station? You think the world is run on kid-gloved, scriptural ethics? It reminds me of a novel I read here awhile ago. It set out to describe An American Politician—and in almost every scene in the book where he appeared, he was drinking tea in some lady's drawing room, declaiming to the fair sex on how he was going to reform politics. He thought he was a deuce of a fellow, and so did the women and the author too. This politician was a good sample of all your reformers. I tell you, the men who go to afternoon teas in America, exert no more

influence on American politics than—than a hen who was too refined to scratch in the barn-yard for worms would exert on the question of female suffrage. Now *don't* make a fool of yourself, Seth. Your predecessor, Samboye, was in no way your equal—some fellow at the club once, I remember, just hit him off in a phrase which he had hunted up in the dictionary to sling at him: 'a nugipolyloquous numbskull'—but he knew enough to feather his own nest, and to take men as they are, and not as the Prophet Jeremiah might think they ought to be. *Don't* make me angry with this pharisaical nonsense! You are very young yet. You will see things differently when you have rubbed up against the world a while longer."

Seth also stood up now, with his hands deep in his pockets—a trick of all the Fairchilds when they were excited.

"I have no desire to make you angry," he answered, beginning with an effort at calmness, but soon raising his voice, "and I shouldn't have dreamed of inflicting my juvenile views on you if you hadn't insisted, even to the point of a threat, on my coming here. I would rather not argue the thing at all. We regard politics from totally different standpoints. I believe that your methods and aims—by 'your' I mean your wing of the party—are scandalous, corrupting and ruinous. I believe that if some check is not put upon the rule of the machine, if the drift of public acquiescence in debased processes of government is not stopped,

it will soon be too late to save even the form of our institutions from the dry rot of venality."

"Seems to me I've read all this. Don't work your old leaders off on me. Talk sense!" said Albert.

Seth dropped rhetoric: "All this is very real, very big, to me. To you it is impracticable and meaningless. You don't at all believe in the dangers which are so apparent to me. Perhaps if you did you wouldn't care. That is all right. I have no desire to convert you, or to debate the question with you. I simply want to explain that there is no community of premises, even, between us on this subject. As for your explanation of the motives underlying the *Chronicle's* attitude, I shan't contradict you. So far as I am concerned, the matter is not in argument. It is enough for me that we bolt the State ticket, and occupy the ground we do. It is no concern of mine by what path we got there."

Albert had heard his brother through with contemptuous impatience. He said now, with one foot on the stove hearth, and in a voice which, by its very coldness of calm, ought to have warned Seth of the temper underlying it:

"You may bolt the State ticket as much as you d—d please. I don't like your doing it, and it will injure you more than any efforts of mine can make good, but I can't help it, and it wasn't for that that I wanted to see you. But if you bolt *me*, Mr. Seth, or put so much as a straw in my path, by God!

I'll grind you, and your paper, and everybody responsible for it, finer than tooth-powder! However—we will exhaust the other side of the subject first. I've had it in mind for a long while, in fact ever since I first procured you a place there, to buy you a share in the *Chronicle*. Workman would be glad of the ready money—he itches for it as much as any living man—and it would be a good thing for you. Would you like that?"

"You haven't told me yet what you dragged me up here, away from my work, for," said Seth. "You presumably had an object of some sort."

"Ah, you want to get down to business, do you? You shall have it, in a nutshell. I want you to see Ansdell, and get him to promise that if I beat him in the Convention he will support me squarely at the polls; I want you to get a pledge from Workman that the *Chronicle* will come out for me, solid, the day after I am nominated. *That's* what I want, and it is mighty little for *me* to ask of *you*! And you may tell Workman for me that if he and his paper give me the smallest ground for complaint, and waver in the least in backing me up, I'll start a paper in Tecumseh before Christmas that will crush the *Chronicle* out of sight. The paper is no good, anyway. I know hundreds of good citizens who would rejoice to have a decent substitute for it."

The pride of the editor was wounded. "You seem to worry a good deal about this worthless paper, at all events," he said, bitterly.

"Don't bandy words with me, youngster!" cried

Albert, scowling and pacing the floor. "I want your answer, or the answer of your employer—yes or no! I'll have none of your impudence!"

Seth held his temper down. He could not help feeling that his brother, from the fraternal standpoint at least, had some pretty strong arguments on his side. He made answer:

"I should have no influence with Ansdell, one way or the other, even if I talked with him. He knows his own business best, and if he has made up his mind to a certain course, nothing that I could say would move him. As for the *Chronicle*, we've kept our hands off, thus far, on your account, and we've said nothing at all about your leading the Dearborn County delegates into the machine camp at the State Convention, although the whole rest of the State is ringing with it. But I am charged to say that that is as much as we can do. If you are nominated, we can't and won't support you. It is not a nice thing for me to have to say to you, but there's no good mincing matters. Besides, you know—there may be a way out of it; you may not be nominated to-morrow."

"All hell can't prevent it!" The words came forth in an explosion of wrath. Albert stamped his foot and clenched his fists as Seth had never seen him do before. He tapped his breast three or four times, significantly, as if there were something in the pocket to which he was referring—Seth remembered the gesture long afterward—and repeated that his nomination was assured. He seemed to

dislike his passion, and strive to restrain it, but the choleric vein between his brows grew more swollen, and his black, keen eyes flashed more angrily than ever, as he strode up and down before the stove.

“Yes, and I’ll be elected too! All the white-livered hounds in Adams County, from my own brother up, shall not stop me! I’ll stump the district every night and day till election. I’ll speak in Tecumseh—yes, in Tecumseh, at the biggest meeting money and organisation can get together—and I’ll handle this whole bolting business so’s to warm the hearts of honest men all over the State. By God! I’ll shake Workman as a terrier shakes a rat, in view and hearing of his whole community! Won’t he squirm though! And won’t the crowd enjoy having him shown up! And *you*”—there followed some savage personal abuse, profane in form—“after to-morrow morning, never let me lay eyes on you again!”

“It is not for the pleasure of seeing you that I come here, ever,” Seth retorted, the words coming quick and fierce. “Be sure I’d never trouble you again, if you were the only one in this house!”

The lawyer’s eyes sparkled with a sardonic meaning, and Seth, as he saw it, bit his tongue with impatience at the thoughtless form of his speech; for he read in this cold, glancing light that nothing had been lost upon his brother’s perception when he entered the room.

There was a full minute’s silence, in which the two men faced each other. Albert was busy thinking

how to put most effectively the things he was now moved to say. At last he spoke, coolly, incisively once more, while Seth, flushed and anxious, pretended to regulate the flame of the lamp.

“Yes, I have no illusions about the motive of your visits to the farm. I am not blind; even if I were, others about the house are not. I am not going to say what you are doubtless expecting. I might point out to you that a young man who comes to a brother’s house—I will say nothing of the debt of gratitude he owes him—and steals chances to make love to that brother’s wife, is a pitiful cur. Stop!”—for Seth had straightened himself angrily at this epithet, despite his consciousness of self-reproach. “I repeat that I *might* say this—but I will not. I prefer to view it in another light. I don’t think you are a knave. To be that requires intelligence. You are a fool,—a conceited, presumptuous, offensive fool. You set yourself up to judge *me*; you arrogate to yourself airs of moral superiority, and assume to regulate affairs of State by the light of your virtue and wisdom—and you have not brains enough meanwhile to take care of yourself against the cheapest wiles of a silly woman, who amuses herself with young simpletons just to kill time. You take upon yourself to lay down the law to a great National party—and you don’t know enough to see through even so transparent a game as this. Get out of my sight! I have wasted too much time with you. It annoys me to think that such an idiot belongs to the family.”

Albert had rightly calculated that he could thus most deeply and surely wound Seth, but he was mistaken in his estimate of the nature of the response. If Seth's vanity was scalded by his brother's words, he at least didn't show it. But he did advance upon Albert with clenched fists, and gleaming eyes, and shout fiercely at him :

“ A man who will speak that way of his wife is a coward and a scoundrel ! And if it is my cousin Isabel he means, he is a liar to boot ! If you were not my brother——”

“ If I were not, what then ? ”

Albert waited a moment for the answer, which the conflict between Seth's rage and his half-guilty consciousness choked in the utterance, and then calmly turned on his heel and left the room, by the same outside door at which he had entered.

As Seth went upstairs, he heard Isabel's door close softly. “ I wonder how much of it she heard ? ” he said to himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NIGHT: MASTER AND MAN.

ALBERT walked across the yard toward the larger of the new stable buildings. It was a dry, warm, luminous night, radiant overhead with the glory of a whole studded heaven of stars. The moon, the full, shining-faced moon of October, would rise in an hour or so, and then would come pale mists along the valley bottom-lands, and perhaps clouds in the eastern sky. But one could walk bareheaded in this soft starlight now, without a fear of cold.

The lawyer paid no sort of attention to the night, but strode across the grass, swung himself over the stile, and pulled back the great stable door, creaking shrilly on its rollers, with angry energy. He stopped upon the threshold of the darkness, through which the shapes of carriages covered with white sheets vaguely loomed, and called out :

“Milton!”

There was the answering sound of footsteps overhead. A door at the top of the stairs was opened, and a flood of light illumined the staircase.

“Oh, you’ve got back, ay?” said a voice from the top.

Albert’s answer was to climb the short, upright flight of stairs, and enter the room above.

It had been Milton's idea, when the new buildings were erected, to achieve complete domestic autonomy by arranging for himself a residential room above the carriage place. The chamber was high and commodious. It had been lathed and plastered, and, in lieu of wall-paper, the sides were decorated with coarsely-colored circus bills, or pictures from sporting weeklies, all depicting women in tights. There was a good corded bed in one corner. Two chairs, a stained pine table on which, beside the lamp, were some newspapers, a little wood stove, and a mantel-shelf covered with tin-types and cheap photographs, completed the scene. Milton enjoyed living here greatly. It comported with his budding ideas of his own personal dignity, and it freed him from the disagreeable supervision which the elder Miss Fairchild was so prone to exercise over all who lived in the house. Only the Lawton girl, Melissa, came across the yard each forenoon, to tidy up the room, and chuckle over the pictures and the tastes which these, and the few books Milton from time to time brought home from a sporting-library at Thesaly, indicated.

"It's lucky you hadn't gone to bed," said the lawyer, curtly, pulling his hat over his eyes to shade them from the flaring light, and sitting down. "I was going to wake you up. What's your news?"

"I've been over to Tyre twice to see Beekman, 'n' no use. Once he wouldn't talk at all—jis' kep his ole lantern-jaws tight shet, 'n' said 'Ef Albert Fairchild wants to see me, he knaows where I kin be

faound.' Th' other time he was more talkative—tried his best to fine aout what I was drivin' at, but I couldn't git no satisfaction aout o' him. He wouldn't bine himself to nothin'. He jis' stood off et arm's lenth, 'n' sized up what I was a sayin' in that dum sly way o' his. I couldn't make head nor tail of him. He wouldn't say he would take money, 'n' he wouldn't say he wouldn't. He wouldn't say yes or nao to th' post office scheme, or anythin' else. He jis' kep' his big eyes on me, as much as to say, 'You ketch a weasel asleep!' 'n' listened. Naow yeh knaow th' hull of it. If yeh want anythin' more done, yeh better do it yerself."

The lawyer looked attentively at his hired man, and drummed with his fingers on the table. "So that's all, is it? You are no further ahead with Beekman than when the Convention adjourned? You've got no proposition from him—no statement as to how he takes my proposals?"

"That's it, Albert—jest it!"

Something in Milton's tone seemed to annoy Albert even more than his confession of failure had done. He rose to his feet abruptly. "Don't 'Albert' me!" he said, raising his voice out of its accustomed calm; "I don't like it! You take too much upon yourself. But—I am to blame for it myself. I've let you run things with too free a hand, and trusted affairs to you that I ought to have kept to myself. It is always my way," he went on, in petulant self-criticism. "I never did trust anybody who was worth the powder to blow him up. I ought to be

used to it by this time. But to encounter two such fools in one evening—and this evening of all others, too—by George! it's enough to make a man strike his mother!"

"I ain't no fool, Mister Fairchild"—the hired man was standing up too, and his harsh tones gave the title an elaborate, almost ridiculous emphasis—" 'n' I'll thank yeh to keep yer tongue civil, tew! Ef yeh don't like my style, yeh kin git sum'un else to do yer dirty work for yeh. I've no hankerin' fer it. I'm hired to manage this farm, I am. Nothin' was said 'baout my hevin' to run a Congresshn'l campaign into th' bargain. I ain't sayin' but what I kin do it's well's some other folks. I ain't sayin' that it's beyon' me. P'raps I've got my pull 'n' this caounty, 's well 's' some other people. P'raps 'f I was amine to, I could knock somebuddy's game skyhigh, jis' by liftin' my little finger tomorrer. I ain't sayin' I'm goin' to dew it. I ain't findin' no fault with yeh. All I say is I ain't goin' to take one ioty o' slack from you, or anybody else, about this thing. You hear *me!*"

The hired man had spoken aggressively and loudly, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest, and his shaggy head well up in the air. He knew his employer pretty well, and had estimated with some precision the amount of impudence he would bear. This full measure he was not disposed to abate one atom. He had failed to buy the Jay County boss, or even to satisfactorily gauge his intentions, it was true, but that was no reason

why he should submit to being called a fool by Albert Fairchild, who couldn't run his farm, let alone his Congressional campaign, without him. So the mean-figured, slouching countryman, with his cheap, ill-fitting clothes, frowzy beard, and rough, red hands truculently spread palm outward on his breast, stood his ground before the city lawyer and grinned defiance at him.

The lawyer did not immediately reply. He was not ordinarily at a loss for words or decisions in his dealings with men, but this rude, uncouth rustic, with his confident air and his fund of primordial cunning, puzzled him. There was some uneasiness in the feeling, too, for he could not remember the exact limits of his confidences with Milton. Moreover he could not afford, at any price, to quarrel with him now on the eve of the Convention. "After the election we'll clip your wings, my fine fellow," he thought to himself, but he gave the words upon which he finally decided a kindlier turn.

"Yes, I hear you. Almost anybody on the side-hill could, the way you are talking. There is no reason why you should lose your temper. If you couldn't fix Beekman, why that's all there is to it. We must go at it in a different way. I can see through him. He's standing out for a cash payment. The old fox wants money down."

"Well, you've got it fur him, hain't yeh? Go 'n' give it to him, straight aout!"

"But that's it—I wanted you to bring back an idea of his figure."

"His figger. How much hev yeh got?"

"Never mind that—it's a d—d sight more than the office is worth; but when a man gets into a fight of this sort, he's got to force his way through, cost or no cost."

"Air yeh sure it can't be traced? Wuz yeh careful to raise it so nobuddy cud spot yeh, and give aout that yeh got so much money together for purposes o' bribery?"

"Yes, it is perfectly safe. There is no record."

"'N' nobuddy on airth knaows yeh've got th' money?"

"Not a living soul!"

The two men communed together as to the importance of immediate action. The Convention was to reassemble at Tyre, fifteen miles away, at eleven the following forenoon. The political master of Jay County, Abe Beekman, who held in his hands the deciding power, lived near Tyre, but in the valley some miles further on. The first train from Thessaly in the morning would be too late, for Beekman would have already arrived on the ground at Tyre, coming from the opposite direction, and would have begun work on his own hook. He must be seen at his home, early in the morning. The question was—how to encompass this.

"You might drive across to-night," Albert suggested; "it can't be more than twenty miles. It's a bad, up-hill road, but four or five hours ought to do it, easily enough. By George—I believe I'll go myself—start at once, see Beekman about daybreak,

and then come back to Tyre by breakfast time; as if I had just driven over from here. No one will suspect a thing."

"Yes, that's a fust-rate idee," assented Milton; "only be keerful 'n' put yer money in a safe place."

The lawyer again slapped his breast with a confident "Never fear about that," and went to the house to get some wraps for the night ride, leaving Milton to harness the grays, and drag out the side-bar buggy with the pole. The hired-man hummed to himself as he moved quietly, dextrously in the semi-darkness in the performance of this task.

Albert returned, just as the hame straps were being buckled.

"Everybody seems to be asleep in the house," he said. "If they ask any questions in the morning, mind you know nothing whatever. That brother of mine is no friend. Be careful what you say to him. Let him walk to the depot in the morning. It'll do him good. Oh yes, by the way, better let me have one of those revolvers of yours—you have 'em upstairs, haven't you—give me the one that strikes fire every time."

Milton came down and out presently, saying that he just remembered having lent the weapon. "'Tother's no good," he added; "yeh don't need no pistol anyway. Th' moon'll be up direc'ly."

Albert gathered up the lines, and drove out slowly toward the road.

"Yeh better save th' beasts till after yeh git over

Tallman's hill, 'n' rest 'em there by th' gulf!" Milton called after him, as a last injunction.

The hired man stood at the stable door, and watched the buggy pass the darkened, silent house, turn out on the high-road, and disappear beneath the poplars. The moon was just coming up, beyond this line of trees, and it made the gloom of their shadow deeper. His eyes, from following the vehicle ranged back to the house, which reared itself black against the whitening sky. There was there no sound, nor any sign of life. He took a revolver out of his pocket, and examined it in the starlight, cocking it again and again to make sure that there had been no mistake. Satisfied with the inspection, he put it back in his side coat-pocket. He went upstairs, changed his hat, took a drink out of a flat brown bottle in his cupboard, and spent a minute or two looking at one of the tin-type portraits on the mantel-shelf. He held the picture to the light, and grinned as he gazed—then put it in his breast pocket, blew out the lamp, and felt his way softly down stairs.

A few minutes later he came out from the stable, leading the swift black mare. She was saddled and bridled, and seemed to understand, as he led her over the grass, that he wanted no noise made. The man and beast, throwing long, grotesque shadows on the lawn, in the light of the low moon, stole past the house, and out upon the road. Milton here climbed into the saddle, and with an exultant little cluck, started in the direction his master had gone, still

keeping the black mare on the grass. They, too, disappeared under the poplars.

The moon mounted into the heavens, pushing aside the aspiring clouds which sought to dispute her passage, then clothing them in her own livery of light, and drawing them upward after her, in a glittering train of attendance. All over the hill-side the calm radiance rested. The gay hues with which autumn's day brush painted the woods, the hedge rows, the long stretches of orchard, stubble, and field, sought now to only hint at their beauty, as they yielded new outlines, mystic suggestions of form and color, in the soft gray picture of mezzotint. Thin films of vapor rose to enwrap the feet of the dark firs, nearer to the sky, and in the valley below the silver of the moonlight lost itself on the frost-like whiteness of the gathering mist. It was a night for the young to walk together, and read love's purest, happiest thoughts in each other's eyes—for the old to drink in with thankful confession the faith that the world was still gracious and good.

Milton was walking the mare now, still on the grass. He could hear the sound of wheels, just ahead.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NIGHT: THE LOVERS.

SETH had gone up to his room in a state of wretchedness which, seeming insupportable at the outset, had grown steadily worse upon reflection. He said to himself that he had never before in his whole life been so humiliated and unhappy, and then smiled with pitying contempt for the inadequacy of such a statement of the case. One's career must have been titanic in its tragic experiences to warrant such a comparison. "I have never known before what suffering was," he thought, as he paced up and down his little room, scourging himself with the lash of bitter reflections.

To try to sleep did not enter his head. He sat for a long time on the side of the bed, seeking to evolve something like order from the chaos of his wits, but he could not think. Had he tried to write, to discuss the thing in a letter, the simple familiar operation of the pen might have led him out of the *cul de sac*. As it was, whichever turn his mind sought to take, there rose an impassable barrier of shame, or rage or self-recrimination. In whatever light he tried to view the situation, it was all pain. He had been curtly, cruelly thrown off by his brother—the

man to whom he owed everything—and he had had to listen to the most cutting, insulting language from this brother before they parted. Then, as he clenched his fists and fumed with impotent anger at the recollection of this language, there would come to divert this wrath, and turn it back upon himself, the facts that he had interposed his own boyish vanity and conceit to balk this brother's purposes, and had been caught trembling on the very brink of making love to this brother's wife. Did he not richly merit Albert's scorn? He could remember—should he ever forget?—the exact words of Albert's contemptuous characterization: "A conceited, presumptuous, offensive fool." Did he not deserve them all? He owed this brother everything: the honest boy insisted upon saying this to himself over and over again, as the basis of all argument on the subject; the opportunity came for him to repay something of this debt. How had he improved it? By setting himself up to oppose this brother in the chief object of his life, and, as if this were not enough, by yielding weakly to the temptation to rob him of his domestic honor as well! "I must be a villain as well as a fool, must I!" the youngster growled between his set teeth, as he threw himself from the bed, and began the gloomy pacing up and down again.

He had not lighted his lamp. The soft half-darkness of the starlight, sufficing barely to render objects visible in the room, suited his mood. He heard the sound of wheels now on the gravel below. Looking

out, he could see that the grays were being driven out; as they turned the corner of the house, the full moonlight fell upon them and the carriage, and Seth saw distinctly that it was his brother who was driving, and that he was wrapped as for an all-night ride.

“He won't even stay under the same roof with me!” he said half-aloud, with a fresh bitterness of self-accusation—and then the torment of reproaching voices began in his breast again.

As he turned from the window he heard a low rapping at his door; a minute later, he heard Isabel's voice, almost a whisper:

“Seth! Don't open the door, but tell me, who was it that went out with the carriage just now? I heard it, but from my window I could see nothing. Was it *he*?”

Seth answered, as calmly as he could: “Yes, I am sure of it. I recognized him.” He stood close to the door, and the thought that only the thin pine panels divided him from her was uppermost in his mind.

There was a little pause. Once his hand involuntarily moved toward the latch, but he drew it back. Then she spoke again:

“You had a terrible quarrel, didn't you, and all for me! I heard your answer, Seth, way up here. How nobly you spoke! It went straight to my heart, to hear his brutality rebuked in that manly way. I shan't forget it.”

There was a moment's silence; then she whispered

with a lingering softness, "Good night!" and he heard the faint rustling of her garments down the hall.

Brief as the interruption was, it had changed the whole spirit of his thoughts. The vindictive accusing demons had vanished, and left no more than a numbing sense of past torture in his breast. The anguish of self-condemnation, the crushing burden of self-humiliation, had passed away. The moonlight, as it spread over the slope toward Thessaly village, seemed to bring healing in its peaceful radiance. His own provocation grew mountain high; his brother's justification for his insults and barbarity diminished. "I was doing only my duty in opposing him," he said confidently, and there was no voice of dissent now. "Still more was I right in defending poor Isabel from his unmanly imputations. If a man is incapable of appreciating such a wife——."

He did not follow out his thought, but surrendered himself instead to calling up, and enjoying in detail, the sweet scene which Albert's coming had so rudely broken into. How delicious it all was, as fancy now limned its outlines—yet not all the dainty graces of imagination and memory could reproduce in its full charm the original. He could think, and think, until the whole room seemed instinct with her presence, but how poor a counterfeit it all was, lacking the perfume of her hair and laces, the deep, languorous glow of her eyes, the thrilling melody of her low voice. The tender, caressing prolongation of syllables in that whispered "good night" made

soft soul-music still in his ears. The insane thought—he did not dare ask himself if it were also a hope—that she might come again, took possession of him, and he stood for a long time close by the door, listening, waiting.

It was while Seth stood thus, seeing only with the eyes of the mind, that Milton stole past on the grass below, with the black mare, on his mission of murder. Had the young man been at the window instead, much that followed might have been different.

Seth stood at the door for what seemed to him a long time, until gradually the futility of the action became apparent to him. "Of course she would not come!" he said, and resumed his pacing once more.

The Faust-like vision began to dance before his eyes again, but with a witchery now which was uncanny. The calm of waiting had brought him enough strength of control to feel the presence of the cloven hoof in it all. The temptation was more urgent, strenuous than ever, but he was conscious of a deeper, more dogged spirit of resistance within him than ever, as well. There was no renewal of the savage, chaotic war of emotions under which he had suffered at the outset, groaning in the self-infliction of purposeless pain. This was a definite, almost scientific, struggle between two distinct forces, and though they fought their battle with all manner of sophistical weapons, and employed feints, pretended retreats and false advances in highest strategical form, he was never deceived for a moment as to which was the bad and which the good.

The issue forced itself upon him, finally, with a demand for decision which was imperative. He could stay no longer in his room. There was neither sleep nor rest of any kind there for him.

He went to the door, and opened it. Through the blackness he could see a faint vertical line of light at the front end of the low hall, as of a lamp burning, and a door left ajar. The yellow ray gleamed as he looked at it, and seemed to wave itself in fascinating motions of enticement. He stood for a moment undecided, all his impulses strongly swaying towards the temptation, all his resisting reasons growing weaker in their obstruction, and some even turning coward, and whispering, as they laid down their arms, "After all, youth has its rights." Then he squared his shoulders, with the old gesture of resolution, and walked steadily away from the line of light, down the stairs, and out of the door, bare-headed under the stars.

He had walked for a long, long time, before he became conscious that he had left his hat behind. The night air was exceptionally mild for the season, but it grew cool enough to bring this fact to his notice. As he put his hand to his head, and stopped short at the discovery, his whole mind seemed to clarify itself. He had been walking aimlessly, almost unconsciously—it must have been for much more than an hour. In a vague way, he knew where his steps had led him. He had walked through the orchard to his mother's grave, and stood for some time by the brier-clad wall and fence which

surrounded it, thinking of his boyhood, and of her. Then he had struck across through Sile Thomas's pasture, to the main road; thence by the way of the school-house, and skirting the hill, to the Burfield road, at the farthest end of the line of poplars.

As he stopped here now collecting his thoughts, awakening himself as it were, the sound of chorus-singing reached him, faint at first, then growing more distinct. A wagon-load of young people were returning from Leander Crump's husking, enjoying themselves in the fair moonlight. From the sounds, they must have been about in front of the Fairchild homestead, and they were coming rapidly toward Seth. If he remained in the road, they must pass and recognize him.

There was a division line of thorn hedge, long since grown into tall young trees, coming to the road here, and a path beside it leading to a rude stile in the turnpike fence. This path went straight to Mrs. Warren's house, as Seth had known from boyhood, but he gave this no thought as he stepped over the stile, and moved along in the shadow of the thorns. He walked a score of yards or so, and then stepped closer into the obscurity of the hedge, to wait till the hay-wagon and its caroling crew had passed by on the road outside. He was feeling very cold now, and tired to boot, and said to himself that as soon as the road was clear he would go home and go to bed.

To his surprise the singing came to an abrupt halt, just as the wagon approached the end of the hedge.

There was a chorus of merry "whoas!" as the horses drew up, and through the clear air Seth could hear a confused babel of voices, all jovially discussing something. One male voice, louder than the rest, called out:

"You'd better let me come along with you!"

There was some giggling audible, out of which rose a clear, fresh girlish voice which Seth knew:

"No, thanks! I can cut across by this path in less than no time. I'm not afraid. The tramps are all abed and asleep by this time, like other honest people."

With more laughter, and a salvo of "good nights!" the wagon started off again, and Annie Fairchild, singing lightly to herself the refrain of the chorus, and holding her face up to catch the full radiance of the moonlight, came walking briskly down the path.

Despite her valiant confidence the young woman gave a visible start of alarm as Seth stepped out from the shadows to speak to her. She threw herself forward as if to run, then looked again, stopped, and then gave a little tremulous laugh, and cried:

"Why, Seth! is that you. Mercy! How you frightened me!"

He could think of nothing better than a feeble parody of her words: "Yes, it is time all honest people were abed and asleep."

He said this with a half-smile, but the girl's face grew more serious still as she looked at her cousin. She spoke eagerly:—

"Why, what's the matter with you to-night?"

Where is your hat? You look as white as a ghost! Oh—have you come from our house? Is it something about grandmother?”

“No, it's nothing about her. I haven't been nearer your place than this. I only stepped in here so as to avoid the wagon. I didn't want them to see me like this.”

“But why should you *be* like this? Now, Seth, I know something *has* happened. What is it? Am I wanted? Can I do anything?”

“Let me walk with you to your house,” he said, and they turned together down the path. “Something *has* happened. I don't know that I can tell you what it is, but only to be with you like this rests and comforts me.”

He was walking in the shadow; the strong light, which only tipped his shoulder occasionally, enveloped her. He watched her furtively as they moved along, and, just in proportion as he found relief and solace in the contemplation of her clear, frank, serene face, he shrank from confiding his own weak woes to her. But, as he said, it was a comfort to be with her.

They had walked almost to within sight of the Warren farmhouse before he broke the silence. She had scarcely looked at him since they started, but kept her gray eyes straight ahead, as if viewing some fixed, distant object. Her lips were tightly pressed together—the only sign of emotion on her face—and this proof that she was hard at work thinking tended further to embarrass him.

"I truly don't know how to tell you, Annie," he said at last. "But Albert and I have—have had words together; in fact—we've quarrelled."

Her lips quivered a little. She did not turn her face toward him, but said, nervously: "I have been expecting that."

Seth did not ask himself the cause of his cousin's anticipatory confidence, but went on gloomily:

"Well, it has come. We had it out, this evening, to the very last word. And then, as if that were not enough, the devil himself got hold of me afterward, and tugged and tore at me to—but I can't tell you *that*. I can scarcely realize myself what I've been through this night. Why, I've been wandering about here on the hill-side for hours, not knowing where I was going, or even what I was thinking of, like a mad man. You can see how my hands are scratched, and my clothes torn; that is from the berry-bushes, I suppose, up by mother's grave. I remember being there. I didn't even know that my head was bare, until just before the wagon came up."

Before this remarkable recital of insane things, Annie was properly silent.

Seth added, after a pause, "But it is all over now. And I can't tell you, you can't begin to guess, how it brings me to my senses, and soothes and restores me to have met you like this."

As he paused suddenly, they both turned to listen and look. From the knoll to the east, where the turnpike ran through a cutting, there came a curiously muffled sound, like yet unlike the first measured

drumming of a partridge. It swelled a second later into something more definite, as they saw a dark horse, the rider crouching low over its neck, galloping like the wind along the high-road toward Thesaly. The pace was something prodigious—the horse had vanished like an apparition before they could look twice. But there had been nothing like a commensurate volume of sound.

“The horse was running on the grass beside the road,” Seth remarked.

“Probably going for a doctor,” was her comment. “I wonder who is ill!”

“It looked to me more like the headless horseman than a sick-messenger.”

As he said this, and they turned to walk again, his face lighted up once more. The thought seemed to please him, and he smiled on her as he added:

“Let me be superstitious enough to fancy that the thing which just flashed by, in a rumble of low thunder, was the demon that has been torturing me all this while. We will say that he has been defeated, baffled, and has fled in despair, and that”—he looked still more smilingly at her—“the fiend has been beaten and driven away by you. Do you know, Annie, that here in this lovely light you are the very picture of a good angel? Perhaps angels don't wear seal-skin cloaks, or have such red cheeks, but if they knew how becoming they were, they would.”

Annie's face, which had been immobile in thought, softened a little. She was accustomed to her cousin's hyperbole.

“I am delighted if you feel better,” she laughed back. “But it is no credit specially to me. Contact with any other rational human being would probably have had the same effect upon you. If I had helped you in any way, or advised you, perhaps I might own the angelic impeachment. But I don’t even know the first thing about your trouble, except that you’ve quarrelled with Albert, and—and had a temptation.”

She had begun gayly enough, but she uttered the last words soberly, almost gravely. Instinct and observation alike told her that Seth’s experiences had been of a deeply serious nature.

He sighed heavily, and looked on the ground. How much could he tell her?—in what words should he put it? Even as he sought in his mind for safe and suitable phrases, an Idea—a great, luminous, magnificent Idea—unfolded itself before his mental vision. It was not new to him—years ago he had often entertained and even nourished it—yet it had been hidden, dormant so long, and it burst forth now so grandly transformed and altered, that for an instant he stopped abruptly, and put his hand to his breast as if to catch his breath. Then he walked on again, still with his eyes on the ground. He fancied that he was meditating; instead, he was marvelling at the apotheosized aptness of the Providence which had sent this Idea at just this time, and swearing grateful fealty to it with all the earnestness of his being.

He looked up at last, and drew her arm through

his. They were near the house now. "I am going to make a clean breast of it, Annie," he said. "If I have not finished when we get to the bars, shall we turn back? I want you to hear it all."

"It is pretty late, Seth," she said, but neither in tone, nor in the manner in which she allowed her arm to be taken, was there the kind of refusal which dismays.

There was no need now to seek words. They came fast, keeping pace with the surge of his thoughts.

"Annie," he began, "I have been as near the gates of hell to-night as it is given to a man to go, and bring back his soul. I have fancied all this while that I was strong because I was successful; that I was courageous because I happened to be clever. I found myself put to the test to-night, and I was weak as water. I am afraid of myself. More, I have been making a fool of myself. I know now the measure of my weakness. I have the brains, perhaps, but I have no balance-wheel. I fly off; I do insensate things; I throw myself away. I need a strong, sweet, wise nature to lean upon, to draw inspiration from. Oh if you could realize the peace, the happiness your simple presence brought me this evening! I haven't said it yet, Annie, but you have guessed it—I want to pledge myself to you, to swear that you are to be my wife."

The girl had drawn her arm from his before the last sentence was finished, and stood facing him. They were within call of the house, but she did not

offer to renew the walk. She answered him with no trace of excitement, looking him candidly in the face:

“I am not sure just how to answer you, Seth. Hardly any girl would know, I think, how to treat such a declaration as that. Wait a moment—let me finish! In the first place, I am in doubt whether I ought to treat it seriously at all. You are disturbed, excited, to-night; when we first met you looked and acted like a madman. And then again—understand, I am trying to talk to you as a friend of all your life, instead of a mere girl acquaintance—I would not marry any man who I did not firmly believe loved me. You have not even pretended that you love me. You have simply complimented me on my disposition, and pledged yourself to a partnership in which I was to be a balance-wheel.”

“You are laughing at me!”

“No, Seth, my dear cousin, not at all. I am only showing you the exact situation. You are too excited, or too unpractical, to see it for yourself. You talk now about being at the gates of hell and expressions like that—wild words which signify only that you have had trouble during the evening. I fancy that all men are apt to exaggerate such things—I *know* you are. Why, do you even know what trouble is? Have *I* had no trouble? Have I not lived a whole life of trial here with a bed-ridden invalid? And there are other things that—that I might speak of, if I chose to complain. For instance” —her face brightened as she spoke, now, and a sug-

gestion of archness twinkled in her eyes—"was it not a terrible thing that I should have waded into the water, that day of the fishing party, and got you out all by myself, and then heard the credit coolly given to another—person, who never got so much as the soles of her shoes wet?"

Annie had begun seriously enough, but the softness of her real mood toward her cousin, together with the woman's natural desire to have justice done her in affairs of the heart, had led her into a half-playful revelation of pique. Seth would have answered here, but she held up her hand, and went on:

"Wait till I am through. You didn't know the truth in that matter of the log-jam. I understand that. There are a good many other things the truth of which you don't know. You don't, for instance, know the real facts about your own mind. You have had trouble to-night—for all your talk about making a clean breast of it you haven't told me yet what it was—and your imagination makes a mountain out of what was probably a molehill, and you straightway rush off bareheaded to wander about like a ghost, and frighten people out of their wits; and then, happening to meet a girl who, by the deceptive light of the moon, looks as if she had some sense about her, you take without consideration the most important step a man can take in his whole life. Isn't that a fair statement of the case? And, thinking it all over, don't you agree with me that you would better tie my handkerchief about your head and go home and go to bed?"

Seth laughed — a reluctant, in-spite-of-himself laugh. “You always would make fun of me when I tried to be serious. But if I ever *was* serious in my life, it is now. Listen to me, Annie! It is not my fault if I see you now, truly as you are, for the first time. I have been a fool. I know it. I said so at the start. But a man is the creature of circumstances, you know. Things have happened to-night which have opened my eyes. I realize now that you have been closest to my heart all the while, that I have loved you all——”

Annie stopped him, with her hand upon his arm.

“I don’t want you to finish that to-night. Please don’t, Seth. It would not be fair to me—or to yourself. Perhaps some other time when you have thought it over calmly—we will talk about it—that is, if you are of the same mind. If you are not, why, everything shall be just as it was before. And more than that, Seth, you—you mustn’t feel in the least bound by what has been said to-night. You know that I am older than you—two whole months! That isn’t as much as four years”—the meekest of her sex could scarcely have foregone that shaft—“but it gives me some sort of authority over you. And I am going to use it for your good. If it becomes necessary, I shall treat you like a perverse little boy, who doesn’t in the least know what is good for him.”

There was no discouragement to Seth in the tones of her speech, however non-committal its text might be. He put his arm about her and murmured:

“To think that I never *knew* until now! Ah, you make me very happy, Annie. And shall you be happy, too, do you think, happier than if we hadn't met?”

She smiled as she disengaged herself, and gave him both hands to say that they must separate: “Happier at least than on the night of the fishing party. I cried myself to sleep that night.”

Seth found the house wholly dark, upon his return. He had no difficulty in getting to sleep, and his heavy slumber lasted until long after the breakfast hour the following forenoon.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONVENTION: THE BOSS.

TYRE had seen better days. In the noble old time of stage coaches it had been a thriving, almost bustling place, with mills turning out wares celebrated through all the section, with a starch factory which literally gave the name of the town to its product as a standard of excellence, and with taverns which were rarely left with a vacant room more than a day at a time. In those days it had been a power in politics too. The old court-house which frowned now upon the village green, elbowing the more modern brick jail out of public sight, was supposed to have echoed in its time about the tallest eloquence that any court-house in the State had heard. From Tyre had come to Albany, and Washington as well, a whole cluster of strong, shrewd, stalwart-tongued politicians, who forced their way to speakerships, and judgeships, and even senatorships, like veritable sons of Anak. It was a Tyre man who had beaten Aaron Burr in such and such a memorable contest. It was another Tyre man who, by assuming lead of the distracted Bucktails at a certain crucial period, had defeated sundry machinations of the Clintonians, and sounded the death-knell of their hopes. There

was a Tyre man in the Regency, of course, and he is popularly believed, at least in Jay County, to have held that storied syndicate up by the tail, so to speak, years after it would otherwise have collapsed. At every State Convention, in this fine old time, inferior politicians from other sections dissembled their appetites until Tyre had been fed to satiety. And in the sowing season of politics, when far-seeing candidates began arranging for a share in the autumn harvest of offices, no aspirant felt that his seed had a chance of sprouting until he had paid a pilgrimage to Tyre, and invoked the mercy, if he could not have the smiles, of the magnates there.

It was due doubtless to the traditions of these visits, when Judge Gould, the hero of the great Biggs murder case, would be at the Nedahma House, and Senator Yates, who unravelled and dragged to the pitiless light the masonic plot to blow up Mount Vernon, was to be found at the turnpike tavern, and both would keep pretty well in-doors toward evening because Colonel De Lancey, who had shot four men before Hamilton's death discredited duelling, was in town on private business—it was no doubt due to these memories that Tyre kept up its political tastes and, in a faded way, its political prestige, long after its material importance and interest had vanished. The mills were remembered now only by the widened reaches in the stream where their dams had once been; the starch factory was a dismantled ruin, from which what woodwork the lightning had spared had long since been abstracted for fuel; one

of the taverns was now a private dwelling, and the other two neither profited themselves nor pleased the wives of the village by their dependence upon local custom. But the men of Tyre were still intense politicians. Indeed their known virulence had given to their county sobriquet of Jayhawker an almost national fame. Nowhere else in the State, proportionately, were so many weekly partisan papers taken—not tame, dispassionate prints, but the fire-eaters of both party presses, with incessant harrowing accounts of peaceful and confiding negroes being massacred in the South, on the one side, answered regularly on the other by long imposing tables of the money stolen by notorious criminals in the public service. This was the meat Tyre fed on, and contending editors could not serve it out too rank or highly peppered for its taste.

The one excitement of Tyre too—far transcending the county fair, which had only interested them casually, and which they had seen moved over to Sidon, on the line of the newly-extended railroad, without a protest—was a political convention. There would be such a crowd about the Court House then as scarcely the spectacle of its being consumed by flames could draw at another time. The freeholders of Tyre paid much more than their fair share of county taxes; they knew it, and did not grumble at the injustice. In fact it rather pleased them than otherwise to see their town rated on the Supervisor's assessment-rolls according to its ancient wealth; the amercement was a testimonial to their dignity. Up-

start towns like Sidon might wrangle over a few hundred dollars, and cheapen their valuation in the public eye by unworthy tricks; Tyre would have none of such small doings; it would preserve a genteel exterior, even if it had to eat pork grease on its buckwheat cakes in domestic seclusion. But if there had been so much as a hint about holding a county convention anywhere else than in the Tyre Court House—then, to use Abe Beekman's homely expression, you would have seen the fur fly! Other towns might indulge their modern and mercenary tastes in county fairs, railroads, gas, reservoirs and the like, to their hearts' content, but they must keep their hands off political conventions. He would be a brazen Jayhawker indeed who should question Tyre's monopoly of these!

So new generations of county politicians followed precedent without thought of murmuring, and accepted the discomforts of jolting in crowded democrat-wagons over the stony, bleak hills to Tyre, of eating cold, bad dinners in the smoke-dried, draughty barracks which had once been hotels, of drinking limed well-water with the unspeakable whiskey—as natural consequences of being interested in the public affairs of the nation. This resignation of other Jay County towns to the convention claims of Tyre swelled into a spirit of truculent defence every two years, when the question of a joint Congressional gathering for all three counties of the district came up. Precisely what would have happened if the bigger shires of Dearborn and Adams had combined

in a refusal to come to Tyre, I am not bold enough to guess. The general feeling would probably have been that a crisis had arisen in which Jay County could do no less than dissolve her relations with the Federal Union.

Fortunately no such menace of secession and civil war was ever suffered to rise glowering on the horizon. Abe Beekman, the boss of Jay County, always managed to have Tyre designated by the District Committee, and the politicians from Dearborn and Adams amiably agreed to console themselves for the nuisances of the trip by getting as much fun out of it as was possible—which, reduced to details, meant bringing their own whiskey, sternly avoiding the dangerous local well-water, and throwing at each other during the dinner scramble such elements of the repast as failed to attract their metropolitan tastes. This procedure was not altogether to the liking of the Tyre landlords, who, however, compensated themselves for the diminution of the bar traffic and the havoc wrought in the dining room, by quadrupling their accustomed prices ; and the invasion of boisterous aliens had its seamy side for the women of the place, who found it to the advantage of their dignity to stop indoors during the day which their husbands and fathers consecrated to the service of the Republic. But Tyre as a whole was proud and gratified.

On the morning when the adjourned District Convention was to reassemble, political interest throbbed with feverish quickness in all the pulses of Tyre.

The town could remember many a desperate and stirring combat on its well-worn battle-field, but never such a resolute, prolonged, and altogether delightful contest as this. The fight had its historic side, too. Every voter in Tyre could remember, or had been taught in all its details about, the famous struggle of the wet fall of '34, when Hiram Chesney, the Warwick of Jay County then, locked horns with the elder Seth Fairchild of Dearborn, and, to pursue the local phraseology, they pawed up more earth in their fierce encounter than would dam the Nedahma creek. Poor Hiram had finally been worsted, falling ignobly on his native stamping ground, before the eyes of his own people. He had long since passed away, as Warwicks should when their king-making sinews have lost their strength. But another boss, perhaps in some ways a greater boss, had arisen in Jay County, in the person of Abram K. Beekman, and now, nearly half a century later, he was to try conclusions with a second Fairchild of Dearborn—a grandson of the hero of '34. They had grappled once, a fortnight before, and had had to separate again, after an all-day tug, with a fall credited to neither. Now, in a few hours, they were to confront each other once more. What wonder that Tyre was excited!

The two gladiators had been the observed of all observers during the preliminary skirmish. Tyre was almost disposed to fancy the Dearborn man. In his portly, black-clad figure, his round, close-shaven, aquiline face, and his professional capacity

for oratory, he had recalled pleasantly the days when the Jay County bar was famous. The local magnate, Beekman, was not a lawyer; he could not make a speech; he didn't even look as if he could make a speech. He had none of the affable, taking ways which Albert Fairchild used to such purpose, but was brusque, self-contained, prone to be dogmatic when he was not taciturn. Thus the balance turned enough in Fairchild's favor to about offset Beckman's claims to local sympathy as a Jayhawker, and put Tyre people in excellent mental trim to enjoy all the points of the duel.

For in the minds of these practical politicians, it *was* a duel. There was a third candidate, named Ansdell, it was true, supported by nearly all the Adams delegation, but then he was a reformer, and had not even come to the Convention, and Tyre had no use for him. A county boss who had got a machine, and purposed doing certain definite things with it, either to build up himself or crush somebody else, was natural and comprehensible; but a man who set himself up as a candidate, without the backing of any recognized political forces, who came supported by delegates elected in a public and lawless manner without reference to the wishes of leaders, and who pretended that his sole mission in politics was to help purify it—who *could* make head or tail out of that?

Thus Tyreans talked with one another, as the village began to take on an air of liveliness after breakfast, and groups slowly formed on the sidewalks in

front of the two hotels. There were many shades of diverging opinion as to the merits and the prospects of the approaching contest, but on one matter of belief there was a consensus of agreement. The fight lay between Beekman and Fairchild, and the third man—it was interesting to note that ignorance of his name was fashionable—wasn't in the race. Steve Chesney, whose right to speak oracularly on politics was his sole inheritance from the departed Warwick, his father, summed up the situation very clearly from the standpoint of Tyre when he said, leaning comfortably against the post office hitching post, and pointing his arguments in the right places with accurate tobacco juice shots at a crack in the curb:

“The hull p'int's this: Dearborn's got seventeen votes, ain't she?—solid for Fairchild. Then he's got two 'n' Adams, ain't he?—makin' nineteen 'n' all. Th' dude, he's got what's left of Adams, fifteen 'n' all. Jay County's only got ten votes, ain't she? Very well, they're solid for Abe. *Now!* Twenty-three's a majority of the convention. Git twenty-three 'n' that settles it. Th' reformer, he needs eight votes. Kin he git 'em? Whair frum? Frum Dearborn? Not much! Frum Jay? Well, not *this* evening! Count him out then. Of th' other two, Fairchild wants four votes, Abe needs thirteen. Thet looks kind o' sickly for Abe, mebbe yeh think. But bear in mine thet th' Adams men air pledged agin' Fairchild by th' same resolution which bines 'em to th' other chap. Abe wasn't a candidate then

'n' he didn't git barred out. But they made a dead set agin Fairchild all through Adams, on 'count of his funny work at th' State Convention. So, Adams kin go to Abe, 'n' she can't go to Fairchild. I tell yeh, Jay can't be beat, ef she's only a mine to think so—thet is, of course, ef Dearborn fights fair. Ef she don't, p'raps she may win to-day, but I tell yeh, in that case ther won't be enough left of her candidate come 'lection night to wad a hoss-pistol with."

The Jay County delegates had begun to straggle into town, and percolate aimlessly through the throngs in and about the bar-rooms, listening to the discussions, and exchanging compliments and small talk with acquaintances. Pending the appearance of their leader there was nothing else for them to do. There was a rumor that Abe Beekman was in town, sending for men as he wanted to see them, one by one, but nobody professed to be in the secret of his hiding place, and nobody dreamed of attempting to find out what Abe wished to keep dark.

The Adams County men, delegates and others, came over the hill from the Spartacus station in a carryall, with four horses, and created a genuine sensation as they drew up with a great clatter and splashing of mud in front of the Nedahma House, and descended jauntily from the rear step to the curb-stone. The natives eyed them all with deep interest, for upon their action depended the issue of the day, but there was a special excitement in watching the nine delegates with stove-pipe hats and gloves, and tight rolled umbrellas, who came from

Tecumseh itself. Tecumseh was the only city in the district, or the whole section, for that matter, and Jay County people timidly, wistfully dreamed of its gilded temptations, its wild revels of sumptuous gayety, its dazzling luxuriance of life, as shepherd boys on the plain of Dura might have dreamed of the mysteries and marvels of Babylon. It was something, at least, to touch elbows with men whose daily life was passed in Tecumseh.

Such of the younger Tyreans as had been introduced to these exalted creatures on their previous visit crowded around them now, to deferentially renew the acquaintance, and shine before their neighbors in its reflected light.

Then the news filtered through the groups round about that Ansdell himself had come up this time, and was the short, wiry little man with the drab overcoat and the sharp black eyes. This aroused a fleeting interest, and there was some standing on tip-toe to get a good view of him, but it could not last long, for Ansdell as a politician was not a tangible thing on which the tendrils of Tyre's imagination could get a real grip.

It was of more importance to learn whether the views of the Adams delegates had undergone any change—whether a new light had dawned upon them in the interim. They submitted graciously to the preliminary test of drinks at the bar, and pretended with easy affability to remember distinctly the various Tyre men who came up and recalled their acquaintance of a fortnight ago, but they had nothing

to say that was to the purpose. They were waiting ; they would see what turned up ; they would certainly vote for Ansdell on the first ballot ; further than that they couldn't say, but they saw no reason now why they shouldn't keep on voting for him ; still, perhaps something might happen—this and nothing more.

Meanwhile there was an uneasy whisper going the rounds to the effect that the two Adams men who had previously voted for Fairchild were now for Ansdell, having succumbed to local pressure during the fortnight. The story could not be verified, for the two gentlemen in question had secreted themselves upon their arrival, and the other Adams men only grinned bland mystery when interrogated on the subject. This worried the Tyre men a good deal more than they would have liked to admit, but there was a certain element of pleasure in it, too, for it added piquancy to the coming fight.

The wooden minute hand of the old clock on the court house cupola had laboriously twitched along to the zenith of the dial once more, marking ten o'clock ; only half an hour remained now before the time for the Convention to reassemble, and the Dearborn delegates were still absent. People began to stroll toward the court house, and casually attach themselves to the outskirts of the cluster of saturnine, clean-shaven, thin-featured old villagers, in high black stocks and broad-brimmed soft hats, who stood on the steps, behind the fluted columns of the building's ambitious Grecian front, and chewed

tobacco voraciously while they set up the rival claims of Martin Van Buren and Francis Granger, or mumblingly wrangled over the life and works of De Witt Clinton. These old men, by reason of the antiquity and single-heartedness of their devotion to their country, had two inalienable and confirmed rights: to sit on the platform close by the speakers when the Declaration of Independence was read each Fourth of July and to have the first chance for seats when the doors were opened at a political Convention.

At last the eyes of those who had lingered about the Turnpike Tavern were gladdened by the sight of the Dearborn crowd, driving furiously up in three or four vehicles. Milton Squires was in the foremost wagon, and he was the first to alight.

He trembled and turned around swiftly as a man laid a hand on his shoulder.

"What d'yeh want?" he demanded, with nervous alertness.

The man whispered in his ear: "Abe Beekman is over in the back settin' room at Blodgett's, 'n' he wants to see your man Fairchile right off."

Milton had regained his composure. "So do I want to see him. Whair abaouts is he? I was to meet him here."

"There ain't been no sign of him here, this mornin'. Nobuddy 'n Tyre's laid eyes on him, so far's I kin fine aout."

"Thet's cur'ous," said Milton reflectively. "He started to drive over early enough. We cum by

train, expectin' to fine him here. P'raps he's seen Beekman by this time, on th' quiet."

"No, he ain't!" The messenger's tone was highly positive.

"Then mebbe I'd better go 'n' see Beekman myself. Whair is Blodgett's?"

The man led the way off the main street, to a big, clap-boarded, dingy white house, fronting nowhere in particular, and stopped at the gate.

"Ain't you comin' in?" Milton asked him.

"I dasen't."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONVENTION: THE NEWS.

THERE were two strange men in the low-ceilinged, grimly-furnished "settin' room," as Milton was ushered into the presence of the Boss, but at a gesture from this magnate they went out; the Boss surveyed the new comer without a word of greeting or comment.

Mr. Beekman was a tall, angular man, past the prime of life, as was shown by the gray in his thick hair, curling at the ends, and in the stiff, projecting ruff of beard under his chin. His face was thin, hungry, with a plaintive effect of deep lines, and his great blue-black eyes were often tearful, like a young robin's, in their intent watchfulness. He was almost wholly Dutch in parentage—of that silent, persistent, quietly-masterful race which, despite all the odds, has still held more than its own in Stuyvesant's State—and the descent showed itself in the dusky hue of his skin. He had never been a wealthy man, though he came of a family decently supplied with substance, and of long settlement in the county. He had climbed to his present eminence after a long career in local politics, by that process of exhaustion which we call the survival of the fittest. Having at-

tained it, his rule was that of a just despot, rewarding and binding still more closely to him the faithful, remorselessly crushing all signs of rivalry, and putting the recalcitrant without pity to fire and sword. He had an almost supernatural faculty of organizing information, and getting at the motives of men. He sniffed treachery as a deer in the breeze sniffs the dog, and he had an oriental way of striking with cruel swiftness, before anybody but the guilty victim suspected offence. Withal, he was a kindly man to those who deserved well of him, an upright citizen according to his lights, and a profound believer in his party.

He sat now chewing an unlighted cigar, with his feet on the hearth of the stove, and contemplated Milton at his leisure. He did not like Milton at all, and one of his chief reasons for doubting the real ability of Albert Fairchild was his choice of such an agent and confidant. At last he said, curtly:

“It’s you, is it? I’ve got no business with you! Where’s Fairchild?”

There was something in Beekman’s eager, searching way of looking at a man with those big bright eyes of his which, coupled with the question, embarrassed Milton, and he fumbled with his hat as he repeated the explanation he had given to the messenger. He was annoyed with himself for being thus disturbed.

The Boss looked his visitor out of countenance once more. Then he said: “Sit daown! Well, what is it to be?”

Milton grinned, and leaned forward familiarly in his chair.

"I sh'd ruther think that was fur you to say."

"Oh, you think so, do yeh? You imagine you've got me on the hip, ay?"

"Well, p'raps we're no jedge, but it sorts o' looks that way, now, don't it?" Milton tipped back his chair, satisfiedly, and put one of his big feet up on the hearth, to dispute possession with the Boss.

Beekman reflected for a minute: then he began, after glancing at the clock:

"There's no time to waste. I might as well talk up 'n' daown with yeh. Your man Fairchild makes me tired. Ef he'd set his heart on goin' to Congress, why on airth didn't he come to me in the first place, 'n' say so? It could 'a' been arranged, easy's slidin' off a log. But no, instid of that, he must go 'n' work up th' thing his own way, 'n' then come 'n' buck agin me in my own caounty, 'n' obleege me to fight back. D'yeh call that sense? He's smart enough in his way, I grant yeh. He's fixed up a putty fair sort o' organisation in Dearborn, although it can't last long, simply because it's all built up on money, 'n' I don't go a cent on that kind of organising. Still it's good enough in its way. *But*, he made his mistake in lettin' the idea run away with him that he could skeer me into a conniption fit with his musharoon organisation. He didn't knaow me. He never took the trouble to find aout abaout me. He jest took it fur granted that I'd crawl daown aout o' my tree, like Davy Crockett's coon, as soon's

he pinte his gun at me. Well, I didn't come worth a cent. Then, when he faound aout that he'd struck a snag, 'n' that Dearborn County wasn't the hull deestrick, he turns raoun' 'n' aouts with his wallet, 'n' tries to hire me to come daown. Fur that's what you was here for last week, 'n' you knaow it 's well's I do."

Milton tried to get in some words here, of dissent or explanation, but the Boss would not hear them.

"Lem me go on ; 's no use your lyin'. That was Fairchild's second mistake. He thought politics was all money. Ef I was poorer than Job's turkey, he couldn't buy me to so much as wink an eye fur him. I'm not in politics fur what I kin make aout of it. I'm in because I like it ; because it's meat 'n' drink to me ; because I git solid, substantial comfort aout of it. Ther's satisfaction in carryin' yer eend ; there's pretty nigh as much in daownin' them that's agin yeh. Jest naow I'm a thinkin' a good deal what fun it 'd be to let the floor aout from under your man altogether, 'n' nominate this feller from Tecumсы."

"But," broke in Milton, "you're a candidate yer-self, 'n'——"

"Wait till I'm threw, will yeh ? I *said*, I'm leanin' a good deal jest naow to'rd this man from Tecumсы. I c'd beat him easy 'nough at the polls, ef he turned cranky, but I daoubt ef it 'd be wuth while. I ain't seen him yet, but I'm told he's here, 'n' ef I like his looks durn me ef I ain't a mine to nominate him.

He can't do no harm, even ef he tries. These reform spurts don't winter well. They never last till spring. The boys lose their breath for a few months. But then they git daown to work agin, and baounce the reformers to the back seats where they belong. But it 'd be one thing to elect a high-toned, kid-gloved, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-his-maouth kind o' man like what's-his-name, 'n' a hoss o' quite another color to 'lect Fairchild. *He'd* make me trouble from the word 'go!' Understan', I ain't afraid of his meddlin' with me here in Jay caounty; not a bit of it. But he'd use his position to cripple me in the deestrick. The present Congressman tried that on —'n' you ain't so much as heerd his name mentioned fur a re-nomination. But it was bother 'nough to squelch him. I ain't goin' to hev it to do all over agin."

"Right you air, tew!" Milton responded.

The Boss held up his hand to forbid further interruption, while he looked curiously at his visitor, as if puzzled by his acquiescence. He went on:

"Ef you was a man of any readin' you'd hev heerd of a custom among Europe-ian kentries, when one whips another, of makin' the under dog in the fight pull aout his front teeth, like. The beaten kentry has to tear daown its forts, 'n' blow up its men-o'-war, 'n' so on, jest as a guarantee not to make any more trouble. Well, ef I'd concluded to hev any dealin's at all with Fairchild, that's what I'd hev done with him. I'd 'a' made him turn over the appintment of all Dearborn's men on the deestrick

Committee; 'n' I'd 'a had a written agreement that half the Postmasters in Adams 'n' Dearborn, as well as all in Jay, should be o' my namin'. My wife's brother should hev hed the Thessaly post office, tew, right under Fairchild's nose, so's to keep an eye on him. It's the duty of every man to purvide for his own fam'ly."

"Nothin' small about *you*! You only wanted the hull airth!" chuckled Milton, ingratiatingly.

"No, it was Fairchild who wanted the airth 'n' thought he'd got it, 'n' while he was deliberatin' whether he'd have it braowned on both sides or not, lo 'n' behold! I went in 'n' took it away from him slick 'n' clean."

The Boss rose as he was speaking, reached for his overcoat and put it on. "Time's up!" he said, sententiously.

Milton had risen too, and placed himself between Beekman and the door. "There's seven minutes yit," he said eagerly, "I've got something yeh can't afford to miss. Don't you want th' nomination yer-self?"

"No. What good 'd Washington be to me? New York State's big enough for me. If yeh don't understand that I put my name before the Convention jest to hold my caounty together, 'n' block Dearborn, yer a dummed sight bigger fool than even I took yeh to be."

"But s'pose Dearborn's votes cud be thrown to you! They'd nominate yeh! What 'd thet be wuth to yeh?"

"What 'd it be wuth?" mused the Boss, looking intently at Milton.

"Yes! in ready money, here! naow!"

The Boss took up his hat, meditatively, and gazed at his companion again. "Did you knaow th' man that brought yeh here?" he asked.

"Yes—'twas Jim Bunner, wa'nt it?"

"That man 'd wade threw fire 'n' water fer me. Yeh couldn't tempt him with a hundred thaousan' dollars to so much as say an evil word abaout me, let alone injure me. Yit he's desprit poor, 'n' th' unly thing I ever did fer him in my life, excep' givin' him a day's work naow 'n' then, was to help him bury his child decently, ten years ago. But I know my *men!* Here Fairchild has took you off a dung-hill, where all yer hull humly, sore-eyed, misrubble fam'ly belong, 'n' made a man of yeh, trusted his affairs to yeh, clothed yeh, fed yeh, yes, 'n' let yeh fatten yerself on the profits of his farm—and naow yeh turn 'raound 'n' offer to sell him aout. By gum! I was right. Fairchild hain't got no sense! 'N' you, yeh skunk, git aout! Don't yeh walk on the same side of the street with me, or I'll swat the hull top of yer head off!"

"We'll nominate Ansdell 'fore you git a chance!" snarled Milton.

The Convention met, depressed by the evident feeling of disappointment among the spectators, who swarmed on all the high, pewlike seats back of the bar railing, while the delegates sat in rows of chairs inside the space reserved in term time for the

lawyers. There was ground enough for this disappointment. Fairchild had not come, and the prospects of a good speech, or even a bitter personal contest, were fading away. No one had an explanation for his absence. The Dearborn delegates were more in the dark than outsiders even, for they had been told to meet him in Tyre, before the Convention, and that he would breakfast at the Turnpike Tavern. Milton reassured them for a time by enlarging upon the bad condition of the roads, but even he ended as they took their seats, by professing some fear of an accident. "However, I'll cast th' solid vaote, th' same as before, I suppose?" he said, and the bondsmen nodded assent.

The proceedings opened tamely. The Chairman was a professor from the Tecumseh Academy; the other counties each had a secretary. Two written announcements were handed up to be read, one that Milton Squires was authorized to cast seventeen votes for Dearborn County, the other naming a man to perform a similar function for the ten votes of Jay. There was to be no break yet awhile, apparently, in the two machine counties. But—what would Adams do?

As this question flashed through the minds of the assemblage, one of the Adams delegates rose, walked to the bench, gave a paper to the presiding officer, and then joined the little throng of spectators to one side. Did this mean that he left the Convention? What *did* it mean? Experienced observers began to feel that something startling was coming.

The paper being read, turned out to be an announcement that Abram K. Beekman had been substituted in the Adams County delegation for the delegate who had just vacated his seat, and as the words died away the Boss himself pushed his way down the aisle, threw his long leg over the bar-rail, and took his seat. The master of Jay County getting substituted for Adams County—here *was* a mystery! Did it portend that Adams had been won for Beekman's candidature? Yes, it must mean that—and Tyre's heart leapt for joy. Or no—it couldn't mean that. The Boss would hardly thrust himself forward in that brash way if he were sure of winning—and Tyre's heart sank again, sadly.

The Chairman announced that balloting would be resumed; that the counties would be called in alphabetical order, and that, in the case of Adams County, which did not signify a desire to vote as a unit, the names of the delegates would also be called in that order. Before the words were fairly out of his mouth a hundred shrewd brains had discovered that this meant Beekman's being the first name called. But what was his game?

So perplexed were the men of Tyre with this problem that they almost forgot to cheer when their man rose to his feet, in response to his name. It was rarely that one saw Abe Beekman in Conventions; he preferred to run them from the outside; and no one in the hall had ever heard him make a speech. Imagine how they listened now!

He spoke with an almost boyish nervousness, resting his hands on the table before him, and clinging, as it were, with his eyes to the Chairman for support. What he said was brief, to the point, and worth repeating here :

“I got substituted, ez p'raps some of yeh hev guessed, because I wanted a word at the very start. I hev my reasons. I ain't a' goin' to mention no names—” he darted a swift, significant glance over toward the Dearborn County men, singling out Milton for a second, then reverting his troubled gaze to the Chairman—“but I kin feel it in my bones that things ain't on the square here. Ther's a nigger in the fence. Mebbe it's no business of mine to yank him aout, but it's only fair to my caounty that we shouldn't let anybody git ahead of us in doin' what we want to dew. It's trew that D. comes ahead o' J. in the alph'bet, but ”—and there was a momentary relaxation of his eager, sombre face as he enunciated this undoubted fact—“its jest as trew that A. comes in front o' D. Ef any set o' men—mind, I mention no names, but—ef any set o' delegates come here with the idee o' sellin' their man aout, or o' makin' a combination which'll put them solid with the next Congressman, and leave Jay aout in the cold, perhaps 'fore I'm threw they'll see thet they bit off more'n their jaws could wag.

“Mr. Cheerman, I don't want to go to Congress. I never 'v' hed the least hankerin' after it. This State of aours is good enough for me. I wouldn't feel like myself ef I had to stan' 'raoun' 'n' see chaps

from Rhode Island or Floridy puttin' on airs, and pretendin' to cut as big a swath as New York did. I'm too much of a State man fer thet. I'd be itchin' to jump on 'em all the while. So I want to say that I withdraw my name——”

The Hon. Elhanan Pratt rose here, his weazen little figure coming up with a spring like a jack-in-the-box, and squeaked out sharply: “I rise to a point of order. The Abram K. Beekman whose name is before this Convention is a Jay County man, nominated by Jay County, and voted for alone by Jay County. No Adams County man”—there was an elaborate sarcasm in the tone—“has any right to withdraw that name.”

“The point of order is well taken,” said the Chair.

“Well, in thet case I won't ask to withdraw my name,” responded Beekman. “But I don't think it'll make much differ'nce. A wink is as good as a nod to a bline man. P'raps you kin git an idee by this time haow the Jay caounty cat's goin' to jump; p'raps you can't. I'm goin' to vaote fer Mr. Richard Ansdell, 'n' I wan' to say——”

He was interrupted here by a stout, sharp burst of hand-clapping from the Adams delegates, and the few Adams men in the audience. The Tyre crowd were taken aback for an instant, and sat bewildered; then the fact that their man had played his game, and was acting as if he had won, inspired them to join tumultuously in the applause, though they were in total darkness as to the nature of the stakes played for.

The Boss went on: "I wan' to say that I've never laid eyes on him but once, 'n' never spoke a word with him in my life. But I ain't lived all this while 'thaout learnin' to read somethin' of a man's natur' in his face. I believe he's honest and straight-aout; I don't believe there's a crookid hair in his head. P'raps he's got some naotions that we'd look on as finnickin' up here in Jay, but I ain't afeard o' them. It's better to hev a man standin' so upright thet he bends back'rd, then to hev— to hev— the fact is, Mr. Cheerman, I think I've said 'baout enough. Th' other candidate hain't showed up to-day! P'raps it's jest as well fur him that he hain't. I guess he'll consider that he's got abaout threw with deestrick politics—but I don't want to appear to be rubbin' it in. The lawyers hev a Latin sayin' abaout speakin' nothin' but good o' the dead——"

Beekman stopped short. The Chairman had risen to his feet. Half the delegates had followed his example, and were gazing intently at one of the tall, small-paned windows on the right side of the room. The three reporters who were sitting in the clerk's desk had begun climbing over the rails and weaving their way between the chairs toward this same window. A hum of rising murmurs was running through the audience. Beekman, finding suddenly that he had no auditors, and disconcerted at the interruption, looked about the room for a moment, in search of an explanation. Then he followed the direction of the faces, and saw his retainer, Jim Bunner, clambering in under the lifted sash, and making strenu-

ous, almost frantic, efforts meanwhile to attract his attention.

The man was breathless with excitement. He had climbed to the window from the roof of a low adjoining shed, and he could be heard now, as he found a footing on the back of a bench, in panting explanation of his conduct : " I *hed* to come this way ! It 'd 'a taken me tew long to've got threw the crowd at th' door. I've got news for th' Boss that won't keep a second ! "

He had pushed his way roughly through the throng now, brushing the reporters aside with especial impatience, and stood whispering, gasping his tidings in Beekman's ear. The assemblage, silent now as the midnight watch, read in the deepening shadows and shocked severity of the Boss's face that something far out of the ordinary had happened. Beekman appeared to be asking some questions, and pondering the whispered answers with increasing emotion.

The waiting hundreds, all on their feet now, watched him in a tremor of expectation.

At last he spoke, in a low, changed, yet extremely distinct voice :

" Mr. Cheerman, when I spoke abaout sayin' nothin' but good o' th' dead, I spoke unbeknaown to myself like a prophet. My friend here brings some awful news. Mr. Fairchild o' Dearborn has jest been faound, stark 'n' cold, crunched under his hosses 'n' carriage, at the bottom of Tallman's ravine ! "

CHAPTER XXV.

“YOU THOUGHT I DID IT!”

WHEN Seth awoke next morning, the position of the shadow cast by the thick green-paper curtain which covered the upper half of his window, told his practised faculties that it was very late, and impelled him to get out of bed, before he began at all to remember the several momentous events of the previous evening. As he dressed he strove to get these arranged in their proper order in his mind. Curiously enough there were certain inchoate recollections of feminine screams, of bursts of hysterical sobbing, of low but rough and strange male voices, doleful and haunting, which confusedly struggled for place in his sleepy thoughts, and seemed now to be a part of the evening's occurrences, now to belong to this present morning, and to have come to him while he was nearing the end of his sleep.

As he passed his Aunt Sabrina's door on his way to the stairs, he heard from within this same sound of suppressed weeping. This much at least of the unlocated recollections must have belonged to the first stages of his waking. “Another quarrel with Isabel!” he thought, as he descended the stairs. “Why is it that women must always be rowing it

with each other!" Then his own dispute with Albert came fresh and overpowering in distinctness of impression across his mind, and the grounds of his grievance against the temper of the other sex faded away.

The living-room was vacant—the breakfast table still standing in the disorder of a meal just finished, and the shades down as though the day had not yet begun, although the clock showed it to be past ten. One of the folding doors of the parlor was open and he heard Isabel's voice—it struck him as being strangely altered toward harshness of fibre—calling him to enter.

She stood, as he remembered her once before, in front of the piano. In the dusk of the drawn curtains—how gloomy and distrait everything about the house was this morning!—her figure was not very clearly visible, but her face was so pale that it seemed to be independent of any light. Her eyes had the effect of slight distention, and, in the shadow, were singularly dark of tint. They were gazing at him with a strange, intent, troubled look, and the expression of the pallid face went with this to disturb him vaguely. He said to himself, in the moment of waiting for her to speak, that he must keep his troth with Annie resolutely in mind, and, if needs be, not shrink from avowing and standing by it.

Isabel did not offer him her hand, or tender him any greeting whatever; only looked him through and through with that searching, unaccustomed gaze.

"I wouldn't let them call you," she said at last, speaking slowly, as if with an effort to both form these words, and repress others. "I knew that you needed the sleep."

"I am sorry if I put anybody out by my laziness. But it is such a relief to be able to sleep like that once in a while, instead of having to get down to the office by eight."

"I heard you go out last night. I heard you come in this morning. But not another soul in the house suspects that you were out; not one!"

The tone was unmistakably solemn, and weighted with deep feeling of some sort. Seth uneasily felt that a scene was impending, though he could not foresee its form. He felt, too, that the part he must play in it would of necessity be an awkward one.

"Yes," he answered, "the night seemed too fine to stay in doors. Besides, I was nervous, and it did me good to walk it off. You can't imagine how light-hearted I was when I returned, or—for that matter—how heavy-hearted when I went out."

"Seth!"

The word came forth like the red flash from clouds which can no longer retain their pent-up, warring, swelling forces—an interjection of passion, of dread, of infinite troubling, of doubt wreathed in struggle with pain. She swayed slightly toward him, her hands clasped and stretched down and forward with a gesture of excessive perturbation, her great eyes lustrous with the excitement of this battle of emotions. Seth fancied that the dominant meaning of

the look was reproach. He could not in the least see his way through the dilemma, or even understand it. He could only say to himself that the enchantment was ended, and that, come what might, he would not forget Annie.

The woman glided a step nearer to him. She put one hand to her brow with a sudden movement, and rested the other upon the piano, as if all at once conscious of needing support. With a painful little laugh, hysterically incongruous, she said:

“I am almost beside myself, am I not? I can not speak to you, it seems! And yet there is so much to say—or no! isn't silence better still?” Her voice trembled as she went on: “For what *could* we say? How meaningless all our words would be in the face of— of——.”

She swept both hands to her eyes, with an impetuous gesture. Her form seemed to totter for a moment, so that Seth instinctively moved toward her. Then with a wild outburst of sobs she threw herself upon his breast, convulsed with incessant paroxysms of passionate weeping.

They stood thus together for some minutes. The young man, moved to great tenderness by her evident suffering, the cause of which he vaguely referred to the previous evening's events, put his arm about her, whispered gently to her to be comforted, and stroked her hair with a soft, caressing touch. His hand touched her cheek, and she shuddered at the contact; then swiftly took the hand in hers, and raised it to her lips, murmuring between the sobs:

“Ungrateful! was it not done for me? Ah, dear, I shall not shudder again.”

She kissed the hand repeatedly, and pressed it to her bosom, as she spoke. She was still trembling like a leaf in his arms.

What could it all mean? he asked himself—and found no answer.

“We must be brave, dear,” she whispered now. “We must be on our guard every instant! Oh—h! they shall tear my heart out before they learn anything—so much as a syllable! We must keep our nerves.” She looked up into his astonished face, with almost a smile in her effort to strengthen his courage. “We *will* be brave, won’t we, mine? The test will come soon now. Perhaps in an hour they will bring—*it!*”

The trembling seized her frame, and shook it with cruel force. She buried her face in his breast with a long, low cry of anguish, and sobbed there piteously, clinging to his hand still. Once she bent as if to kiss it again, but stopped, then turned her head aside, groaning “Oh how terrible! how terrible!”

The mystification now demanded light of some sort.

“What is it that is so terrible, my poor girl?” he asked. “What are they going to bring in an hour? Tell me, Isabel—my sweet sister—what does it all mean?”

She looked up into his face, with flickering suggestions of a mechanical smile at the corners of her pale lips, and with soft reproach in her eyes:

“Are you going to pretend to *me*, too, dear one? As if it were not all here in my heart—all, all! Ah, they shan't get it! They shan't get the shadow of a hint. You were home here all the while! You were asleep, sound asleep! If it be necessary, I could swear that I *knew* you were asleep, that—but no, there might be suspicion then. That we mustn't have! Don't fear for me, dear one! I shall be so discreet, so circumspect, watching, weighing every word! But oh—h—shall we dream of *it*? What if we should, and should cry out in our sleep—Oh—h, my God! my God!”

She sank again, convulsively clutching his hand, and quivering with feverish sobs upon his breast.

“Upon my soul, I don't in the least know what you are talking about, Isabel! Do try and be calm, and tell me what it is!”

“*He asks me!*” she cried, with the same jarring, painful half-laugh he had heard before.

He held her from him, so that he might look into her face.

“Come, come! You are acting like a tragedy-queen on the stage. Do be sensible, and tell me what the matter is. You make me out of patience with you!”

He spoke in the vexed tone of a man needlessly perplexed with foolish mysteries. To her strained senses the simple expression of impatience was cruel mockery. She drew herself still further back from him, and dropped his hand. She was able to speak collectedly now:

“It is *you* who are the actor. You persist in playing the part—to *me!*”

“Still in riddles! *What* part, Isabel?”

“You *will* have me tell you? You want to hear the thing—in words?”

“Yes, by all means.”

She had never once taken her frightened, fascinated gaze from his face. “You insist on hearing from my lips that while you were out last night your brother was murdered——”

“What!”

“Murdered not four miles from here, as he was driving on the road, and his body thrown down into a ravine. Some boys found it. Fortunately, everybody thinks it was an accident. The men who brought the news thought so.”

She had spoken the words coldly, as if they were commonplaces and had been learnt by rote; but all the passion of her being was flaming in her eyes, which transfixed him with their stare.

“Murdered!” the young man stammered, feeling his senses reeling. “Albert murdered! Oh-h this must be nonsense! It is too terrible to think of even! You are out of your mind, Isabel!”

Her lips quivered: “It would be no wonder if I were, after *this!*”

The darkened rooms, the sobbing of his Aunt upstairs, the sounds of anguish that he knew now had partially awakened him, the crazed demeanor of Isabel—all these rose around him, like a black fog, to choke and confound his mind. Her fixed gaze burned him.

"Tell me what you know!" he cried, wildly.

"Wouldn't it be easier to tell me what *you* know?"

The chilling tone of the words startled him, as might a sudden contact of warm flesh with ice, before his bewildered brain had grasped their meaning. Then, like the crimson, all-pervading outburst of a conflagration, the thing dawned upon him, and his thoughts seemed blood-red in its hideous light. He pushed her from him fiercely, returning her piteous look of fright with a glare, and biting his tongue for words that should be great enough to fairly overwhelm her. As she cowered, he strode toward her:

"You thought I did it!" he shouted at her.

Her only answer was to bury her face in her hands, and sink weakly at his knees.

He stood relentlessly glowering down upon her. The bitter, brutal words that might be heaped upon her, nay, that ought to be, crowded upon his tongue. It was too great a task to restrain them, to keep silence.

"*You* thought *I* did it," he repeated. "And you didn't object—you didn't shrink from me! Why, I remember—my God!—you kissed my hand! You said: 'it was done for me!' Oh-h!"

The woman at his feet, her face hidden, had been sobbing violently. She lifted her eyes now, and strove appealingly to conquer him with their power. She rose, unaided, to her feet, and confronted him. Terror and tenderness visibly struggled for the mastery of her facial expression, as for the mood behind it.

"Don't, Seth, don't! Can't you see how I am suffering? Have you no pity? How *can* you have the heart to speak to me like this?"

"*You* talk about pity—about hearts!"

"How long ago was it that they were on your tongue—that you had your arms stretched open for me?"

"Don't recall it!"

"If I were to die this day, this hour, it would be the one thing I should want to remember, the one thing of my life that I should hug to my heart. What is changed since then? A man dead?—a man dies every minute of the day somewhere in the world! Suppose I was wrong! Suppose it *was* an accident—yes, we'll say it was! *Don't* you see—how little that is, how unimportant, compared with—*with—*"

She finished the sentence by a faltering step toward him, her arms outstretched, her lips parted, her form offering itself for his embrace with a sinuous seduction of moving outlines.

The old witchery flamed up for a second in his pulses; then it was emberless ashes.

Without a word he turned and left her.

Aunt Sabrina opened the door of her room in response to his strenuous rapping, and wiped her tear-stained face with the end of her shoulder-shawl as her nephew entered. At his behest, she told all the tidings that had come to the farm. Its master had been found at the bottom of Tallman's ravine, by

some boys who had climbed down to see if the beech-nuts were turning. The whole equipage had pitched off the narrow road which crossed the gulf at this point, high above. The buggy was smashed. One of the horses was dead; the other had two of its legs broken. Half hidden under the carriage and one of the beasts was Albert, quite lifeless and cold. The men who brought the news believed every bone in his body must have been broken.

As she concluded the bare recital of facts, the poor old maid began her sobbing afresh.

"I might uv knaowd it'd 'a' come to this," she groaned; "'pride goeth before a fall,' ez Solomon says. I hed my heart tew much sot on his goin' to Congress; I was exaltin' my horn tew high. I was settin' by the window, that very minute, watchin' Sarah Andrews go by perked up in their democrat wagon, with her injy shawl 'n all her fine feathers on, 'n' never so much 's turnin' her head this way, 'n' I was sayin' to myself, 'M' lady, you'll come daown a peg 'r two off 'n your high hoss when Albert goes to Congress'—'n' there the men was comin' in the gate, thet identical minute, with the news. I tell you!" she roused herself into indignant declamation here, "men like Zeke Tallman ought to be hung, who 're tew shiftless or penurious to fix up their fences on pieces o' raoad like thet, sao's to keep folks from drivin' off in the dark, 'n' killin' themselves! That's what they ought!"

"But it wasn't dark, Aunt Sabrina," said Seth;

"the moon was so bright all last night, you could have seen to read by it."

The old lady was too occupied with her own thoughts to even think of inquiring as to her nephew's source of information. She only rocked to and fro, desolately, and said, as if talking to herself:

"Sao much the wuss, Seth. It *was* to be! Nothin' could a' stopped it. Thet old witch, M'tildy Warren, is right. There's a cuss on aour fam'ly. Here, almost inside tew years, Sissly's gone, 'n' Lemuel's gone, 'n' naow its poor Albert! 'N' he was gittin' so like his grandfather, the Senator, tew, gittin' to look like him, 'n' ack like him; I kin remember my father——"

Seth had left the room, with soft footsteps. He would go at once to the scene of his brother's death.

At the outside door, as he opened it, he stood face to face with Annie. She gave him her hand silently. Her face was paler than he had ever seen it before, and she looked on the ground, after the first little start of surprise at the meeting, instead of into his face.

"You have heard?" he whispered.

"Yes. Isn't it awful?"

"Will you go upstairs and see Aunt Sabrina? She is in her room. I think the sight of you would do her good."

"Yes. What a terrible shock it must be to her. And——?"

"The widow? You'll find her in the parlor.

Strange enough, she was weeping her eyes out when I last saw her." He could not keep the bitterness out of his tone.

"Poor woman!" was all that Annie could find it in her heart to murmur, as Seth passed her on his gloomy errand, and she entered the house of mourning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CORONER.

THERE was a short cut by which, using a rough back road across the hill, and then a dimly-marked bridle path down the bed of the creek, one could get to Tallman's ravine in less than an hour on foot. Seth saddled the black mare, and brought her up on the meadow plateau overlooking the gulf, panting and white on breast and barrel with foam, inside fifteen minutes. He had galloped furiously, unable to think save in impatient flashes, and reckless alike of his own neck and the beast's wind and limbs. He reined up the plunging mare at the very edge of the ravine, where some score of farmers and boys were standing clustered under the trees, watching his excited approach.

As he threw himself from the saddle among them, and looked swiftly from face to face for the right one to speak to first, the attention of the elder bystanders concentrated itself upon the mare. They would have given their foremost thoughts to her anyway, for they were owners of livestock even before they were neighbors, and her splashed and heated condition appealed in protest to their deepest feeling—reverential care for good horseflesh. But there was something more: the mare was

strangely, visibly agitated at the sight of the glen before her, and reared back with outstretched trembling forelegs, lifted ears, and distended, frightened eyes.

"By Cracky!" cried Zeke Tallman himself, "don't it beat natur'! This 'ere mare knaows what's happened! Look at her! She senses what's layin' down there at the bottom!"

"'N' yit they say dawgs has got more instinck than a hoss!" said a younger yokel. He kicked a mongrel pup which was lounging around among the men's legs, with a fierce "Git aout! yeh whelp, yeh! What d'*you* knaow abaout it!" to illustrate his contempt for this canine theory.

A third farmer, more practically considerate, took the shivering, affrighted beast by the bridle, and led it away from the gulf's edge, patting its wet neck compassionately as they went.

Meanwhile Seth had found his way through the group to his brother John, who stood with his back against a beech tree, springing from the very brink of the gulf, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the trampled grass at his feet. A half circle of boys, with one or two girls of the school age, stretched about him at some distance, like the outer line of an open fan, mutely eyeing him as the second most important figure in the tragedy. They separated for Seth to make his way, and made signs to each other that the interest was doubled by his arrival. The brothers shook hands silently and scarcely looked at each other.

There came the sound of a pistol shot from the glen below ; somebody said : " There ! they've killed th' off-hoss. Ther' goes th' best matched team o' grays in Dearborn Caounty ! "

" Have you been down yet, John ? " Seth asked softly, as the low buzz of conversation began about them once more.

" No, not yet. I suppose I could if I had insisted on it, but when I got here, twenty minutes or so ago, they told me here that Timms had got his jury together down there, and forbidden anybody coming down till they were through. So I've stayed here. Not that I care about Timms, but—I can wait."

" Let's go down ! " As he spoke, Seth swung himself around the beech, and began the descent, letting himself swiftly down the steep, mossy declivity by saplings and roots. His brother followed. One or two boys started also, but were roughly restrained by their elders, with a whispered " Stay back, can't yeh ! H'ain't yeh got no sense. Them's the brothers ! "

The scene at the bottom was not unlike what Seth's fancy had painted it, adding the terrible novelties of the night to a spot he had known from boyhood. Half-shaded even in the noon sunlight by overhanging branches from the towering, perpendicular sides of the glen, the miniature valley lay, a narrow stretch of poor, close-cropped grass, with the spiral, faded mullein stalks, the soft brown clumps of brake, the straggling, bloomless thistles, and even

some tufts of glowing golden-rod, which push their way into unfrequented pasture-lands and encompass their sterility. The stream, which once had been a piscatorial glory of the section, but now, robbed of its water and its life by distant clearings, mills and reservoirs, wandered sadly and shallowly on an unnoted course, divided itself here to skirt each side of the gulf with a contemptible rivulet—the two coming together abruptly at the mouth of the low stone culvert, and vanishing into its dark recesses, above which rose, sloping steeply, the high embankment of the road traversing the ravine.

It was over this embankment that horses, carriage and owner had precipitately pitched; it was at its base, on the swail and gravel of the stream's edge, that the wreck lay, surrounded by a little knot of men. Vertical gashes in the earth down the bank, with broken branches and torn roots, marked the awful track of the descent; the waters of the brook to the right, dammed by the body of the horse killed in the fall, had overflowed the sands and made muddy rivulets across to the culvert.

The Coroner turned with obvious vexation at the sound of the brothers' approach. "I thought I give word—" he began; then, recognizing the newcomers, added, without altering his peremptory, officious tone: "It's all right; you can come now, if you want to. The gentlemen of the jury have completed their labors for the present. I was on the pint of adjourning the ink-west."

The brothers joined the jurors, and dumbly sur-

veyed the spectacle at their feet. One of the grays lay across the rivulet; the other, more recently dead, was piled awkwardly upon its mate's neck and shoulders, in an unnatural heap. The front portions of the buggy, scratched but not smashed, were curiously reared in the air, by reason of the pole being driven deep into the soft earth, between the horses; the rear wheels and the seat, broken off and riven by the violence of the shock, were imbedded in the marsh underneath. On the higher ground, close in front of the brothers, lay something decorously covered with horse-blankets, which they comprehended with a sinking of the heart.

"He lay in theer, part under the hind wheels 'n' part under the nigh hoss," explained the Coroner, with dignity. "The fall was enough to brek his neck twenty times over, let alone the hosses may've kicked him on the way down. We hev viewed the remains, 'n' we've decided——"

"We ain't decided nothin'!" broke in one of the jurors, a serious, almost grim-faced farmer, with a bushy collar of gray whiskers framing his brown square jaw. "How kin we decide till we've heerd some evidence, 'n' before the ink-west is threw with?"

"There's some men 'd kick if they was goin' to be hung. Did I *say* we'd arrived at a verdict? What I mean is we've agreed to adjourn the ink-west now till arter the funeral."

"Well, why daon't yeh say what yeh mean, then?" rejoined the objecting juror. "They can't no cor'-"

ner make up my verdict fur me, 'n' you'll fine it aout, tew."

"The more fool me fur panelin' yeh!" was the Coroner's comment.

The brothers insensibly edged away from this painful altercation. A little elderly man, in shabby broadcloth which seemed strangely out of place among the rough tweeds and homespuns of the farmers, detached himself from the group of jurors, and came over to them, with a subdued half-smile of recognition. It was the Thessaly undertaker.

"Tew bad, ain't it?" he said glibly, "allus some such scrimmage as thet, on every one of Timms' juries. He ain't got no exec'tive ability, *I* say. I'd like to see *him* run a funer'l with eight bearers—all green han's! I told him thet once, right to his face! But then of course yeh knaow *I* can't say much. He's techy, 'n' 'twouldn't do fur me to rile him. We hev a kind o' 'rangement, you see. I hev to be on hand any-way, 'n' he allus puts me on the jury; it helps him 'n' it helps me. I kin always sort o' smooth over things, if any o' th' jurors feels cranky, yeh knaow. They'll listen to me, cuz they reelize I've hed experience, 'n' then there's a good deal in knaow-in' haow to manage men, in hevin' what *I* call exec'tive ability. Of course, this case is peculiar. They ain't no question abaout th' death bein' accidental. But this man you heerd kickin', this Cyrus Ballou, he's makin' a dead set to hev' Zeke Tallman condemned fur hevin' his fence up there in bad repair.

He 'n' Tallman's a lawin' of it abaout some o' his steers thet got into Tallman's cabbages, 'n' thet's why——”

“I suppose we can leave this to you!” John broke in, impatience mastering the solemnity of the scene. “Have you made any arrangements? You know what ought to be done.”

“Yes, my boy ought to be here by this time with my covered wagon, what I call my ambulance.”

The brothers turned away from him. The little man remembered something and hurrying after them laid his hand on John's arm.

“When I spoke abaout allus bein' on the jury, you knaow, p'raps I ought to've explained.” He proceeded with an uneasy, deprecating gesture. “You see, a juror gits a dollar a day, 'n' sometimes friends of the remains think I ought to deduck thet f'm my bill, but ef you'll jest consider——”

“Oh for God's sake! leave us alone!”

It was Seth who spoke, and the undertaker joined his fellow-jurors at the foot of the hill forthwith. The brothers went back, and stood again in oppressed silence over the blanketed form.

Dr. William Henry Timms meanwhile conversed apart with his panel. He was a middle-aged, shrewd-faced man, who, like so many thousands of other Whig babes born in the forties, had been named after the hero of Tippecanoe. He was more politician than coroner, more coroner than doctor. He hung by a rather dubious diploma upon the out-

skirts of his profession, snubbed by the County Society, contemned by most sensible Thessaly families as "not fit to doctor a sick cat." But he had a powerful "pull" in the politics of the county, and the office could not, apparently, be wrested from him, no matter how capable his opponent.

In the earlier years of his official service he had been over zealous in suspecting mysteries, and had twice been reprimanded by the Supreme Court Judge, and much oftener by the District Attorney, for enveloping in criminal suspicion cases which, when intelligently examined, were palpable and blameless casualties. These experiences had sensibly modified his zeal. He had put the detective habit of mind far away behind him, and, like a wise official, bent all his energies now to the more practical labor of dividing each inquest into as many sessions as possible. Had he been a Federal Deputy Marshal, he could not have been more skilled in this delicate art of getting eight days' pay out of a three hours' case. A bare suggestion of mystery at the start, to be almost cleared up, then revived, then exploited carefully, then finally dissipated, and all so deftly that the District Attorney, who lived at Octavius, would not be inspired to come over and interfere—this was Dr. Timms' conception of a satisfactory inquest. Occasionally there would be the added zest of an opportunity to formally inflict censure upon somebody, and if this involved some wealthy or potential person, so much the better: to withhold the censure meant tangible profit, to stern-

ly mete it (failing a fair arrangement) meant public credit as a bold, vigilant official.

Dr. Timms was still turning over in his mind the professional possibilities involved in Tallman's bad fence-building, and casually sounding his jurors as to their private feelings toward the delinquent; the brothers had followed the jury up to the meadow plateau, and were standing aloof from yet among their neighbors, answering in monosyllables, and following mentally the work of the undertakers' squad down in the bottom; the farmers were beginning to straggle off reluctantly, the demands of neglected work and long-waiting dinners conquering their inclination to remain—when a big carry-all from Tyre drove up on the road outside, and a score of men clambered out and over the fence to join the group. They had driven post-haste from the Convention, and among them were Ansdell, Beekman, and Milton Squires.

Mr. Ansdell came straight to the two brothers, giving a hand to each with a gesture full of tender comprehension. While they talked in low tones of the tragedy, they were joined by Abe Beekman; upon the normal eagerness and wistful solemnity of his gaunt face there was engrafted now a curious suggestion of consuming interest in some masked feature of the affair. He was so intent upon this, whatever it might be, that to the sensitive feelings of the other three he seemed to dash into the subject with wanton brusqueness.

“How air yeh, Fairchild?” he nodded to John,

"I want somebody to tell me this hull thing, while it's fresh. Who knaws th' most 'baout it? Where's th' Cor'ner? What's he done so far?"

Obedient to a word from John, the Coroner dignifiedly came over to the beech tree, where our little group stood, and listened coldly to a series of searching questions put by the Jay County magnate. When they were finished he made lofty answer:

"I ain't institooted no inquiries yit. That'll be arranged fur later, to convenience the family 'n' the officers of the law. It ain't customary, in cases of accident like this, to rush around like a hen with her head cut off, right at the start. The law takes these things ca'mly, sir—ca'mly 'n' quietly."

"But have you made an examination?—you are a doctor, I think," interposed Ansdell. "Have you satisfied yourself when the death occurred? Have you learned any of the circumstances of it? Were there any witnesses?"

The Coroner looked at the questioner, then at the brothers, as if including them in his pained censure, then back again at Ansdell:

"I don't know ez it's any o' *your* business," he said. "Who *air* yeh, any way?"

Before anyone else could answer, Beekman spoke: "He's the next Congressman from this deestrick—nominated by acclamation over at Tyre to-day—that's who *he* is. But never mind that, what I want to knaw is—air yeh sure he died from an accident? Kin yeh swear to thet ez a doctor?"

"Toe be sure I kin!" responded the official, in a

friendlier tone. "He was simply mashed out o' shape by the fall. He come down forty feet, ef it was an inch, plum under the horses. They jest rolled over each other, all the way down.—And so this is Mr. Ansdell, I presewm. I'm proud to make yer acquaintance, sir. Only by the merest accident I wasn't at the Convention to-day, sir."

The undertaker came up now to announce that the first stage of his labors was completed and that the ambulance wagon was on the road outside, ready to start for the Fairchild homestead.

"We went up by t'other side, lower daown the gulf," he explained; "'twas easier, 'n' then there was no shock to yer feelin's. Ef I might be 'lowed to s'jest, it 'ud look kine o' respectful to hev all these friends of the remains walk two by two, behine the wagon, daown to the haouse. Yeh might let the carry-all come along arterwards, empty, yeh knaow, ez a sort o' token of grief."

The suggestion was passively accepted as the proper thing under the circumstances, and the little procession began to shape itself on the road outside. Seth was moving toward the fence with the others, when the thought of the black mare he had ridden to the scene occurred to him. A farm-boy was holding the animal a little way off, near some bars opening from the meadow to the road. Seth saw Milton getting over the rails—he had been busy on the outskirts of the assemblage gathering accounts from those earlier on the ground—and said to him: "Won't you get the mare, and ride her home,

along with the carry-all. I shall walk—with the rest.”

The cortege had formed just beyond the fateful narrowing of the road, where it crossed the gulf, and the men who were to follow Albert to the homestead, including all the late comers from Tyre and a few neighbors, had looked down the steep declivity, and noted the new breaking away of earth on the road's edge, before they passed on to fall in line behind the black, shrouded vehicle. The procession had moved some rods when there came sounds of excitement from the rear; at these some of the walkers turned, then others, and even the driver of the ambulance drew up his horses and joined the retrospective gaze.

The black mare was balking again, on the road directly over the gulf, and was crowding back with her haunches tight against the fencing on the side opposite to that over which her late master had fallen. It was a moment of cruel tension to every eye, for the fence was visibly yielding under the animal's weight, and another tragedy seemed a matter of seconds. Milton appeared to have lost all sense, and was simply clinging to the mare's neck, in dumb affright. Luckily a farmer ran forward at this juncture, and contrived to lead the beast forward diagonally away from the spot. Milton sat up in the saddle again, turned the mare away from the gulf, and galloped off.

“Dummed cur'ous thet!” whispered Beekman to Seth; “does thet mare ack thet way often?”

“I never knew her to balk before to-day. She acted like that when I first brought her up to the ravine. It *is* curious, as you say. But animal instinct is a strange, unaccountable thing any way.”

“Hm-m!” answered the Boss of Jay County, knitting his brows in thought, as the procession moved again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANNIE AND ISABEL.

ANNIE found the living room of the Fairchild homestead unoccupied. She could hear Alvira talking with the Lawton girl out in the kitchen, and from the parlor on the other side there came a murmuring sound which she did not comprehend at once. As she laid her hand upon the stair door, with the purpose of ascending to Sabrina's room, this sound rose to a distinguishable pitch. It was a woman's weeping. Annie hesitated, listening for a moment; then she turned, rolled one of the parlor doors back, and entered.

Isabel lay buried in the blue easy-chair, her face, encircled by one arm, hidden against its back. The great braids of her yellow hair were dishevelled and loosened, without being in graceful disorder. Her whole form trembled with the force of her hysterical sobbing.

At Annie's touch upon her shoulder she raised her face quickly. It was tear-stained, haggard, and looked soft with that flabbiness of outline which trouble may give to the fairest woman's beauty when it is not built upon youth; over this face passed a quick look of disappointment at recognition of Annie.

“Oh, it is you!”

The almost petulant words escaped before Isabel could collect herself. She sat up now, wiping her eyes, and striving with all her might for control of her thoughts and tongue.

“Yes, Isabel. I *was* going up to Sabrina’s room, but I heard you sobbing here, and I felt that I must come to you. It is all so terrible—and I do so feel for you!”

“Terrible—yes, it *is* terrible! It was kind of you to come—very kind. I—I scarcely realize it all, yet. It was such a shock!”

“I know, poor dear.” Annie laid her hand caressingly on the other’s brow. She had not come with over-tenderness in her heart, but this unexpected depth of suffering, so palpably real, touched her keenly. “I know. Don’t try to talk to me—don’t feel that it is necessary. Only let me be of use to you. It will be a dreadful time for you all—and perhaps I can spare you some. I shan’t go to the school to-day. Oughtn’t you to go up to your room now, Isabel, and lie down, and leave me here to— to arrange things?”

“No, not yet! Perhaps soon I will. My impulse is to stay down, to spare myself nothing, to force myself to suffer everything that there is to be suffered. I’ll see; perhaps that may not be best. But not now! not now! No—don’t go! Stay with me. I dread to be left alone; my own thoughts murder me!” She rose to her feet, and began pacing to and from the piano. “Let me walk—and

you talk to me—anything, it doesn't matter what—it will help occupy my mind. Oh, yes—were you at Crump's last night? I heard them come by, late, singing."

"Oh, Isabel, how *can* we talk of such trivial things? Yes, I was there; I was in the singing party, too. It makes me shudder to think that at that very minute, perhaps——" The girl paused for a moment, with parted lips and troubled face, as if pondering some sudden thought; then exclaimed, "*Oh-h!* the horse! Could it have been!"

"Could what have been!" Isabel stopped in her caged-panther-like pacing, and looked deep inquiry.

"But no, of course not! What connection *could* there have been! You see, after I left the wagon, to cut across by the path at the end of the poplars, a horse came galloping like the wind up the road, with some figure lying low on its back. We were too far away to see distinctly, though the night was so light"—she had insensibly drifted into the use of the plural pronoun—"but the thing went by so like a flash that it seemed an apparition. And come to think of it, there was an effort to avoid noise. I know I wondered at there being such a muffled sound, and Seth explained——"

She stopped short, conscious of having said more than she intended.

"Seth was with *you*, then?"

"Yes—he met me, quite unexpectedly, by the thorns. He had been out walking, he said; the night was too fine to sleep."

“Yes, I heard him go out, an hour and a half at least before the singers came by. Did he say anything to you about what had happened, here in the house, during the evening?” Isabel’s azure eyes took on their darkest hue now, in the intentness of her gaze into her companion’s face.

“Only that he had had words with Albert—poor boy! how like a knife the memory of them must be to him now!”

“Did he tell you what the words were about?”

“No.”

“Did he say anything else to you?”

Annie grew restive under this persistent interrogation. The habit of deference to the older, wiser, more beautiful woman was very strong with her, but this did seem like an undue strain upon it.

“Why yes, no doubt he did. We talked of a number of things.”

“What were they? What did he say?”

“Well, really, Isabel, I——”

The elder woman gave a little click with her teeth and, after a searching glance into the other’s face, resumed her walk up and down, her hands clenched rather than clasped before her, and her movement more feline than ever. “Well, really you—what?” she said with the faintest suggestion of a mocking snarl in the intonation.

The girl drew herself up. It was not in human nature to keep her tone from chilling. “Really, I think I would better go up to Sabrina. I fancied I might be of some service to you.”

"Annie! Are you going to speak like that to me?—*now* of all times!" The tone was outwardly appealing. Annie's sense was not skilled enough to detect the vibration of menace in it.

"No, Isabel, not at all. But you make it hard for me. Can you wonder? I think to comfort a desolate, stricken woman in her hour of sorrow, and she responds by peremptory cross-examination as to what a young man may have said to me, in the moonlight. Is it strange that I am puzzled?"

"Strange! Is not everything strange around and about me! That I should have married as I did; that I, loathing farm life, should have come here to live; that I should be waiting here now for them to bring my husband's corpse home to me—is it not all strange, unreal? The conversation ought to be to match, oughtn't it?"—she spoke with an unnatural, tremulous vivacity which pained and frightened the girl—"and so, while we wait, I talk to you about young men, and the moonlight, and all that. *Can't* you see that my mind is tearing itself to pieces, like a machine in motion with some big rod or other loose, pounding, crushing, right and left like a flail! We *must* talk! Tell me what he said, anything—everything."

"Why, that isn't so easy," Annie replied dubiously, much mistrusting the sanity of all this conversation, but pushed along with it in spite of herself. "He said something about a misunderstanding with his poor brother, and then—then something that I didn't at all understand about a temptation, a great tempta-

tion leading him to the gates of hell he called it—but you know how Seth is given to exaggerate everything—and then——”

“He told you all this, did he. How confiding! How sweet! Go on—what *else* did he say to you—in the moonlight.”

Annie felt vaguely that the tone was cruel and hostile. As she paused in bewildered self-inquiry, Isabel glided forward and confronted her, with gleaming eyes and a white, drawn face.

“Why do you stop there?” she demanded in a swift, bitter whisper.

“There *are* things which—a girl doesn’t like to—have dragged from her in this——”

Even as Annie was forming this halting half-sentence, a change came over the elder woman. She dropped the hand which had been raised as if to clutch Annie’s shoulder. The flashing light passed from her eyes, and something of color, or at least of calm, came back into her face.

“I understand!” she said, simply.

“You can see, Isabel, that this is not a time I should have chosen to speak of such things to you, if you had not insisted. It seems almost barbarous to bring my joy forward, at such a time, and appear to contrast it with your affliction. You *won’t* think I wanted to do it, will you?”

The widow of a day was looking contemplatively at her companion; she had effaced from both expression and voice every trace of her recent agitation. “Are you sure it is all joy?” she asked calmly.

"I wouldn't admit it to him. And at first I was not altogether clear about it in my own mind. Indeed, with this other and terrible thing, I can scarcely think soberly about it, as it ought to be thought of. But still—you know, Isabel, we were little children together—and I have never so much as thought of anybody else." Annie spoke more confidently, as she went on; the notion that there had been malevolence in Isabel's tone had faded into a foolish fancy: there seemed almost encouragement, sympathy, in her present expression. "I should have lived and died an old maid if he had not come to me. And it comforts me, dear, too, to think that in your great trouble I shall have almost a sister's right to be with you, and help you bear it."

Isabel did not respond to this tender proffer of solace. She still stood eying her companion reflectively. "You are very certain of being happy, then?" she mused.

A sense of discordance touched the girl's heart again—a something in the restrained, calm tone which seemed to sting. She looked more searchingly into the speaker's eyes, and read in their blue depths a mystery of meaning which froze and silenced her. While Annie looked, in growing paralysis of thought, Isabel spoke again, slowly:

"Your married life at least won't be deadly dull, as mine was. There must be great possibilities of excitement in living with a man who can propose marriage to a girl—in the moonlight—*on his way home from having murdered his brother!*"

Young Samantha Lawton, the member of the tribe who served as maid-of-all-work at the Warren homestead, had a mind at once imaginative and curious. From an upper window she had caught sight of the mournful procession from Tallman's ravine, winding its way down the hill, in the distance. She stole out from the house, whose bed-ridden occupant could at best only yell herself hoarse in calling if she chanced to need anything during her absence, and walked up the path by the thorns to the main road, over which the cortege would presently pass. Inside the sharp angle of shade made at this corner, where the thorns aspiringly joined the poplars, there was an old board seat between two trees, the relic of some past and forgotten habit of rendezvous, perhaps whole generations old. Samantha knew of this seat, and stood on it now; from it, she had a clear view of the road in front and, through the tangled thorns, of the meadow-path to the left, while there were branches enough about her to render her practically invisible. From this coign of vantage Samantha saw some things which she had not expected to witness.

Annie Fairchild came suddenly across the line of vision, from the direction of the dead man's house, and walked straight to the stile at the edge of the thorn row. There was something so curious in the expression of her face, as she advanced, that Samantha scented discovery, and prepared on the instant an exculpatory lie. But Annie passed the one place where discovery was probable, and the hidden girl

saw now that the strange look had some other explanation. She crossed the stile, and clung to the fence post, as if for support; glanced up the road, where now the black front of the nearing procession could be discerned; then with a shudder turned her face in profile toward her unsuspected observer, and looked vacantly, piteously up into the afternoon sky.

Annie's face, with its straight, firm outlines, was not one which lent itself to the small facial play of evanescent emotions. Its regular features habitually expressed an intelligent, self-reliant composure, not easily responsive to shades of feeling. To see this calm countenance transfixed now with a helpless stare of anguish was to comprehend that something terrible had happened.

She stood at the stile, deperditely clinging to the rail at first, then edging into the thorns to be more out of sight, as the ambulance and the little file of friends moved slowly by. She noted nothing of the peculiarities of the procession—that most of the silent followers were strange men, in city dress—but only gazed at Seth, walking along gravely behind the vehicle, beside his brother John. She saw him with eyes distended, fixed—as of one following the unfolding of a hideous nightmare. So long as the party remained in sight, these set, affrighted eyes followed him. Then they closed, and the sufferer reeled as if in a swoon.

Samantha's first and best impulse was to get down and go to the agonized woman's aid; her second,

and controlling, thought, was to stop where she was, and see and hear all that was going.

Annie seemed to recover her strength, if not her composure. She wrung her hands wildly and talked with strange incoherence aloud to herself. Once she started, as if to cross the stile again and return to the house of mourning, but drew back. At last, walking straight ahead, like one in a dream, she moved toward her home.

Samantha followed at a safe distance, marvelling deeply.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BETWEEN THE BREAD-PAN AND THE CHURN.

“WELL, I don’ knaow ’s I go’s fur’s Sabriny, ’n’ say ther’s a cuss on th’ fam’ly, ’n’ thet M’tildy Warren put it there, fur after all, three deaths hand-runnin’ in tew years ain’t an onheard-of thing, but I don’t blame her fur gittin’ daown-hearted over it. Poor ole creetur, she’s be’n a carryin’ the hull load o’ grief on her shoulders sence Sissly died. I shouldn’t wonder if it ’d be tew much for her naow.”

Alvira sighed, and let her eyes wander compassionately from the kneading board and its batch of dough to the old, cushioned arm chair by the kitchen stove where Aunt Sabrina customarily sat. This last bereavement had rendered the hired-girl almost sentimental in her attitude toward the stricken old maid—so much so that when young Samantha Lawton dropped in, toward evening, and offered to sit down in this chair, Alvira had sharply warned her to take another.

The girl had brought a note over from Annie to Seth, and was not a little vexed that Alvira should have taken it from her, and gone upstairs to deliver it herself, instead of allowing the messenger to complete her errand. She declined, therefore, to display

any interest in the subject of the aged aunt, and warmed her hands over the glowing stove-griddles in silence. The elder Lawton girl, Melissa, resting for a moment from her churning, turned the talk into a more personal channel.

“Fur *my* part, I think it’s a pesky shame, where there’s three big strappin’ men ’raoun’ th’ haouse, to make a girl wag this old churn-dash till her arms are ready to drop off. ’N’ I’ll tell ’em sao, tew.”

“I sh’d thought Dany’d done it fur yeh” said her younger sister, with a grin. “He allus seemed to me to be soft enough to do all yer work fur yeh, ef you’d let him.”

“Not he! Both he ’n’ Leander ain’t so much ’s lifted a finger ’raoun’ th’ haouse to-day. They’re off daown to th’ corners, hangin’ raoun’ th’ store, ’n’ swoppin’ yarns ’baout th’ accident. *They* wouldn’t keer ’f I churned away here till I spit blood. In th’ mornin’ he’ll be awful sorry, of course, ’n’ swear he furgot all ’baout Wednesday’s bein’ churnin’ day. Thet’s th’ man of it!”

“’N’ I s’pose Milton never does nothin’ ’baout th’ haouse naowadays,” remarked Samantha, interrogatively.

“No, siree!” snapped Alvira. “You bet he daon’t! He’s tew high ’n’ mighty fur thet! Prob’ly he’s furgot so much as th’ name of a churn, even. He might git his broadcloth suit spotted, tew. I wouldn’t dream o’ askin’ *him*. I’d ruther ask Seth any day then I hed Milton. *He* don’t put on half so many airs, even if he does git thirty dollars a

week in Tecumseh, 'n' live 'mong ladies 'n' gentlemen ev'ry day 'f his life."

Melissa rested from her labors again, to say sneeringly: "Pritty ladies 'n' gentlemen he *use't* to travel with, there in Tecumсы, accordin' to all accaounts!"

Alvira paused in turn, with her arms to the elbow in the floury mixing, and an angry glitter in her little black eyes. "Ef I was *some* folks, 'n' hed *some* folk's relations in Tecumсы, 'pears to me I'd keep my maouth pritty blamed shut 'baout what goes on there!"

The retort was ample. There was no answering sound, save the muffled splash and thud of Melissa's vigorously-resumed churning.

The lull in conversation was beginning to grow oppressive when the young visitor asked: "Haow does th' fine lady take it?"

"She seems more opset than anyone'd given her credit fur," Alvira answered, sententiously.

Melissa interposed to expand this comment, and rest her arms: "Yes, she *seems* opset enough. P'raps she *is*. But then agin, p'raps ef you was young 'n' good lookin', with blew eyes 'n' a lot o' yalleh hair thet was all yer own, 'n' you hed a husban' twice as old as you was, 'n' he sh'd fall daown 'n' break his neck, 'n' leave you a rich young widder, p'raps you'd cry yer eyes aout—when people was lookin'—speshly if thet husban' o' yours left a likely young brother who was soft on yeh. When you git as old 's I be, S'manthy, you'll learn ther's a good deal in appear'nces."

"When she gits as old as you air," broke in Alvira, sharply, "I hope she'll learn better 'n' to blab everythin' thet comes into her head! You'll let that cream break, ef yeh don't look aout!"

"I don't b'lieve its within an 'aour o' comin'" said Melissa, wearily resuming her task.

"No, but—reelly," began Samantha, "is Seth —?"

"Never you mind whether Seth is or whether he isn't," answered Alvira. "A young tadpole of a girl like you's got no business pryin' 'raoun' older folks' affairs. You better go home! M'tildy may need yeh. Yer sister's got her work to dew, 'n' so 've I."

This plain intimation produced no effect upon Samantha. She continued to warm her hands, which were already the hue of a red apple with the heat, and remarked: "No, she don' want me. Annie said I might stay 's long 's I wanted to. She said she wanted to be left alone. She's about the wuss broke up girl *I* ever sot eyes on. You ought to see the way *she* takes on, though. I bet the widder ain't a succumstance to her. Ef you'd seen what *I* saw, 'n' heern what *I* heerd this afternoon, I guess you'd think so tew."

The girl spoke calmly, with a satisfied conviction that nobody would tell her to go home again in a hurry.

"What was it?" came simultaneously from the kneading-board and the churn.

"Oh, I dunnao,—I ain't much of a han' to blab

everythin'. A young tadpole of a girl like me, yeh knaow, ain't got no business——"

"Come naow! *Don't* be a *fool*, S'manthy! Ef you've got anythin' to say, spit it aout!"

Thus adjured by the commanding tones of Alvira, the girl trifled no more, but related what she had seen, while hidden behind the thorns. She had a talent for description, and made so much of Annie's stony face and strange behavior, that she succeeded in producing an effect of mystification upon her listeners scarcely second to that under which she, as an involuntary spectator, had labored. The success of her recital was not lost upon Samantha, as she went on:

"Et was after th' undertaker's waggin 'n' th' men—some gallus lookin' young fellers, f'm Tecumsey I guess, was amongst 'em—et was after these'd all gone by, thet I heerd her talk. She kind o' hid herself in th' bushes while they was a goin' by, 'n' stared at 'em like mad, ez fur's she c'd folly 'em. Then she bust aout—not a-cryin' mind yeh, fur she never shed a tear—but wringin' her han's 'n' groanin' 'n' actin' 's ef she was goin' to faint. I c'd see her jest ez plain 's I kin see you stan'in' there naow, 'n' heer her, tew. All to onc't she up 'n' said——"

The young girl stopped here in the narrative abruptly, with a fine disregard for the consuming interest with which her companions were regarding her; she lifted her nose, and drew two or three leisured sniffs. Then she bent down at the side of the stove and repeated them.

"Ther's somethin' burnin' in thet oven," she said at last, confidently.

"Et's th' barley. I knowed S'briny 'd traipse off 'n' leave it. She allus does;" said Alvira, flinging open the oven door, and dragging out with her apron a smoking pan of scorched grain.

Through the dense, pungent smudge which temporarily filled the room, Samantha was heard to remark with offensive emphasis: "We allus drink genu-wine coffee over to M'tildy's. She's mean enough 'baout some things, but she wouldn't make us swell ourselves aout with no barley-wash."

"'N' sao do we here, tew—all but S'briny!" retorted Alvira, indignantly. "She got use' to drinkin' it in war-times, when yeh couldn't git reel coffee fur love n'r money, jes' ez all th' other farm-folks did. On'y she's more contrary 'n' th' rest, 'n' she wouldn't drink nothin' else naow, not ef yeh poured it into her maouth with a funnel. But go on 'th yer yarn!"

Samantha had to cough a little, on account of the smoke, and then it took her some moments to collect the thread of her narrative. But at last even the spirit of Tantalus could invent no further delay, and she proceeded:

"Well, she didn't say much, fer a fact, but they was business in ev'ry word she did say. Fust she hollered aout—right aout, I tell yeh: '*Et's a wicked lie! She's a bad, wicked woman!*' Then she stopped fer awhile 'n' put her han's up to her for'id—like this. Then she shuk herself, 'n' commenced to climb back over th' stile, but she seemed

to think better of it, 'n' started fer her own haouse, like 's ef she was a walkin' in her sleep, 'n' a groanin' to herself: '*Seth a murd'rer! Seth a murd'rer!*' Thet's what I heerd!"

The girl put both feet up on the stove hearth, and tilted her chair back in conscious triumph. "Got 'n' apple handy?" she inquired of Alvira, carelessly, in the tone of one whose position in life was assured.

To this strange recital, involving such terrible suggestions, there succeeded a full minute of silence in the kitchen, broken only by the ponderous clucking of the high wooden clock. Alvira and Melissa looked at each other dumbly—each for once willing to forego the first word.

"Well, what d'yeh say to *thet*?" finally asked Melissa.

After some reflection, Alvira answered, "I sh'd say S'manthy was a lyin'."

"S'elp me die, crisscross, I ain't!" protested the girl at the stove: "I've told it all, jest's it happened, straight's a string. Where's yer apples?"

Alvira meditated again for a moment. Then she said to her subordinate: "Go down 'n' git that sister o' yourn a Spitzenberg—'n' bring up some cider, yeh might's well, too."

When Melissa had gone, Alvira went over to the younger girl, and gripped her sharply by the shoulder: "Look here, you, is what you've be'n tellin' us here honest? Don't lie to *me*!"

"Honest Injun? Alviry! ev'ry word!"

Alvira returned to her dough, and slapped it savagely into a huge, unnatural pancake. She maintained silence until Melissa had returned, and not only supplied her sister's wants, but poured out a cupful of the new cider for herself, as a proof of her appreciation of the Lawton family's supremacy over the existing crisis. Then Alvira spoke :

“ I don't 'tach th' least 'mportance in th' world to what S'manthy heerd. Annie's a school-teacher, 'n' she's be'n workin' pritty hard, 'n' this thing's kind o' opset her—what with tendin' to her gran'mother, 'n' then this teachin', which is narvous, wearin' kine o' work. Thet's th' trewth o' th' matter. I kin understan' it. She was jest aout of her senses. But other folks won't understan' it as I dew. Once a hint gits flyin' amongst outsiders, who knaows where it'll stop? Naow, girl 'n' woman, I've be'n in this haouse twenty year 'n' more. I'm more a Fairchild than I'm anythin' else. I remember th' man in there—layin' dead in th' parlor—when he was a youngster, comin' home f'm college; I remember Seth when he was a baby. I ain't got no folks of my own thet I keer a thaousandth part 's much ababout, nur owe a thaousandth part 's much tew, ez I dew this Fairchile fam'ly. *Well!* They've hed trouble enough, this las' tew year, 'thout havin' any added onto it by th' tattlin', gossipin' tongues of outsiders. I ain't goin' to *hev* it! D'yeh understan'! Ef I heer s'much 's a whisper of this yere crazy school-teacher's nonsense reported 'raound, by th' Lord above, I'll skin yeh both alive!”

"Who's *b'en* a gossipin'?" asked Samantha, reproachfully. "I shouldn't never said a word, ef you hadn't insisted, 'n' called me a fool fur holdin' my tongue."

"I dunnao where you'll gao to when you die, S'manthy," said Alvira, reflectively. "But nao, girls, trewly naow, this mustn't be mentioned. Yeh kin see with half 'n eye what a raow it'd stir up. Naow prommus me, both o' yeh, thet not a word of it shell pass yer lips. Yeh can see fer yerself haow foolish it is! Ev'rybody knaows he driv off th' raoad, 'n' killed himself 'n' th' hosses by th' fall. It's ez plain 's th' nose on yer face. Still it's jest sech cases as this thet people git talkin' abaout, once they're sot goin'—so yeh *will* promise me, won't yeh?"

They promised.

"Hon'r bright, ye'll never say a word to nao livin' soul?"

They asseverated solemnly, honor bright, and Samantha had a doughnut as well as another cup of cider.

The tiresome butter came at last, and the dough passed into a higher form of existence through the fiery ordeal of the oven; supper was laid and silently eaten; two neighbors, volunteers for the night-watch with the dead, came, and were ushered into the gloomy parlor; while apples, cheese, doughnuts and a pitcher of cider were placed on the table outside, for their refreshment in the small hours. Night fell upon the farm.

Melissa Lawton stole out-doors as soon as Alvira retired to her room, and made her way through the darkness to the barns. As Albert had done on the fatal previous evening, she opened the sliding door of the big stable, and called up the stairs to Milton. There was no response, and investigation showed that he was not in his room, although the lamp was burning dimly. The girl stopped long enough to look over the familiar coarse pictures on the walls and the shelf, and then crept down the steep stairs again.

As she groped her way through the blackness to the stable door she came suddenly in contact with a person entering, and felt herself rudely seized and pushed back at arms' length.

"Who's here? What d'yeh want?" demanded a harsh voice, which seemed despite its gruffness to betray great trepidation.

"It's me—M'lissy!"

"Come along aout here into the light, so I kin see yeh. What a' yeh doin' here, praowlin' 'raoun' 'n th' dark, skeerin' people fur?"

The Lawton girl's native assurance all came back to her as she confronted Milton in the dim star-light outside—which was radiance by contrast with the stable's total darkness—and she grinned satirically at him.

"You've got a nerve on you like a maouse, I swaow! You trembled all over when yeh tuk holt o' me, in there. What was yeh skeert abaout? I wouldn't hurt yeh!"

"I wa'n't skeert," the man replied, sullenly. "What was yeh after in there?"

"I was lookin' fur you."

"What fur?" The tone was still uneasily suspicious.

"I got somethin' to tell yeh."

"Well?"

"D'yeh knaow, I more'n half b'lieve this thing wa'n't an accident at all. What'd yeh say 'f it sh'd turn aout to be a murder?"

Even in this faint light Melissa could see that Milton was much taken aback by the suggestion. He thrust his hands into his pockets, pulled them out again, shuffled his feet, stammered, and betrayed by other signs general among rustics his surprise.

"Pshaw—git aout!" he said at last; "what nonsense! Of caourse 't was 'n accident. Didn't th' Cor'ner say sao? Daon't ev'rybody knaow it?"

"Annie Fairchile don't say sao. *She* don't knaow it."

The girl went on to relate the substance of Samantha's revelations, adding unconsciously sundry embellishments which tended to throw a clearer light upon Seth as the chief figure in the mystery.

Milton listened with deep attentiveness. His slow, inefficient brain worked hard to keep up with the recital, and assimilate its chief points. When the girl had finished he still thought steadily on this strange story, with its unforeseen, startling suggestions. Gradually two items took shape in his mind as most important: that Annie believed Seth to be the

criminal, and hence would be estranged from him ; and that if by any unexpected means people came to suspect foul play, here were the elements of a ready-made suspicion against Seth. The first of these was very welcome ; it would be time enough to think of the other if a discovery were made.

“ What dew I think ? ” he said at last, in response to the girl’s repeated inquiries. “ I think thet sister o’ yourn lied, ’n’ I think yeh better keep yer maouth, ’n’ her’n tew, pritty dum shet, ef yeh don’t want to git into trouble.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BOSS LOOKS INTO THE MATTER.

“COUSIN SETH—There are reasons why I cannot come to the house again, even to the funeral; and why I shall not see you again during your stay. I think you will understand them. If you explain to Aunt Sabrina that I am ill, it will not be a falsehood. I have been and am suffering—terribly. But nobody can help me, save by leaving me to myself. I am trying to forget, too, everything that was said when we last talked together, and I shall succeed. Never fear, I shall succeed.

A.”

It was this note, scrawled in a hand very unlike Miss Annie's customary prim, school-teacher's writing, which Samantha had borne over from the Warren house. Seth had studied it, perplexedly, for a long time on the evening of its arrival. He ruminated now again upon it, as he walked along the road toward Thessaly, the following forenoon. The temptation to confide the thing to John, who had stayed over night with him at the homestead, and now was walking silently by his side toward the village, wavered in his mind. Perhaps John could assist him to comprehend it; but then, it would be necessary to explain so much to him first. Finally the arguments in favor of confession triumphed, and

with a "Here, old man; this is a letter from Annie. I want you to help me guess what it means," he made the plunge.

John read the note carefully. "What was it you talked about on this occasion she refers to, and when was it?" he asked.

"It was night before last, *the* night, and I asked her to marry me."

"And what was her answer?—I'll tell you afterward how glad I am to hear what you've just told me."

"Well, it wasn't decisive—but she admitted that it made her very happy."

"And you haven't seen her since?"

"No—or yes! I did. I met her just for a moment yesterday forenoon, as I was starting out from the house after hearing—the *news*. We only exchanged a word or two, though."

"Did she seem angry with you then?"

"Not at all!"

"Well, what can have happened since? Try and think! She has reasons, she says, which she thinks you will understand. When a woman says she has 'reasons' she means that some mischief-maker has told her something disagreeable. Now——"

"Oh, my God! I see it now!" Seth stopped short in the road, and clenched his fists.

"Well, what is it?"

"She went into the house, and saw Isabel!" Seth continued, as if talking to himself.

"What has that got to do with it?"

Seth looked up at his brother with a blanching face, in which fright and amazement blended. "What is that line of Congreve's about Hell having no fury like a woman scorned?" he asked mechanically.

It was John's turn to stare. Gradually a light began to spread in his mind, and make things visible whose existence he had not suspected before. "Well, you *are* a simpleton!" he said.

"Don't I know it?" was the pained, contrite response.

The brothers walked on a few yards in silence. Then John said "Of course, you needn't tell me any more of this than you want to—but at least I can ask you—how *much* of a fool have you made of yourself up at the farm?"

"That's hard to say. Just now I'm inclined to think that I am the champion ass of the world."

"Well, you're displaying some sense *now*, anyway. What have you done?"

"I haven't done anything. That's the foolish part of it all."

John stopped in turn, and looked his brother's face attentively over. "Go on, now," he said, "and tell me what there is of it. There's no use in my butting my brains out against a stone wall, guessing at such an inscrutable mess as this seems to be."

"It's hard to tell—there isn't anything specially *to* tell. I simply got sort of sentimental about Isabel, you know—she was lonely and disappointed in life, and my coming to the farm was about the only

chance for company she got, and all that—and then I found the thing might go too far and so I stopped it—and to clinch the thing, asked Annie to marry me. That's what there is of it."

"That's good as far as it goes. Go on, youngster; out with the rest of it!"

"I tell you that *is* all."

"Humbug! Annie never wrote this letter on the strength of such philandering nonsense as that. You say Isabel must have told her something. What *was* that something? Do you know?"

"Yes!" The answer was so full of despondent pain, that John's sympathy rose above his fraternal censoriousness.

"Come, my boy," he said, "you'd better make a clean breast of it. It won't seem half so bad, once you've told me. And if I can help you, you know I will."

"Well, I *will* tell you, John. Night before last, Monday night, I had hard words with Albert, up at the house. You know how he sent for me, insisted on my coming, and what he wanted. Of course I could only say no, and we quarreled. Toward the end we raised our voices, and Isabel, who was upstairs, overheard us. Just then he began about me and her—it seems he had noticed or heard something—and she, hearing her name, took it for granted the whole quarrel was about her. I went upstairs, and presently he drove out of the yard with the grays. I couldn't sleep, I was so agitated by the idea of our rupture, and I went out to walk it off.

It was while I was out that I met Annie and had the talk I have told you about. Then I came home, went to bed, and slept till after ten—long after everybody else had heard the news. I heard of it first from Isabel, and she—she——”

He came to an abrupt halt. The duty of saying nothing which should incriminate the woman rose before him, and fettered his tongue.

“And she—what?” asked John.

“Well, she somehow got the idea that I had followed Albert out and—and—was responsible for his death! *Now* you have it all!”

There was a long silence. They were nearing the four corners, and walking slowly. Finally John, with his eyes on the ground, said: “And so that’s what she has told Annie, you think?”

“That’s the only way I can explain the note.”

“But Annie couldn’t possibly believe such a thing as that!”

“No—but there’s an explanation for that too. Come to think of it, I must have said a lot of things to her, that night, which seem now to her to fit in with this awful theory. Poor girl! I don’t blame her.”

John answered, after a pause, “There’s no use of my saying anything to show you what a situation you are in, or to scold you for it. I suppose you realize it fully enough. What’s more to the purpose, we must consider what is to be done. It is safe enough to assume that if Isabel thinks this and has said it to one person, either some one else will think

it, or she will hint about it to another. The thing is too terrible to have even one person, even if she were silent as the grave, think about it. The obvious thing, I should think, would be to have a post-mortem examination."

"I thought they always had them at inquests."

"No, the Coroner can dispense with one if he and the jury agree that it isn't necessary. Timms sent me word that he had decided to dispense with one, in this case, 'out of consideration for the feelings of the family.' That means, of course, that he wants the *Banner* to help re-elect him next year. But now out of 'consideration for the family' we'll have to have one. Don't be so down in the mouth about it, boy; it will all come right, never fear!"

The brothers had reached the solitary building at the corners—a low, dingy store, with its sloping roof turned to the road, and a broad platform and steps stretching along its entire front. A horse and vacant buggy stood at the hitching-post. John proposed to go in and get some cigars, if Turner had any fit to smoke.

Their surprise was great at meeting on the steps Mr. Beekman of Jay County, who was coming out. After terse salutations had been exchanged, Beekman said:

"Lucky you fellows come daown jest ez yeh did. I come over this mornin' a-purpose to see yeh, 'n' yit I didn't quite like to go up to th' farm. I've got ever so many things I want to ask yeh, 'n' say to yeh."

He led the way over to the farther end of the

steps, and, following his example of sitting down on the platform, they waited curiously for him to proceed:

“Fust of all, I was daown to Tecumсы last night, 'n' saw Workman. He said you”—turning to Seth—“needn't worry yerself 'baout comin' back till yeh was ready. They kin keep th' paper runnin' for a week or sao, while you stay up here 'n' dew yer duty like a Christian.”

Seth said he was much obliged, and then asked how it happened that Beekman had posted off to Tecumseh—over seventy miles—and returned so soon.

“Well, there was some things I wanted to see abaout daown there, 'n' more thet I'm interested in keepin' an eye on up here. So I kind o' humped myself.”

“I'm glad to see you taking such an interest in Ansdell's campaign,” said John.

Mr. Beekman's gaunt visage relaxed for a second: “So yeh calc'late *thet's* what I'm buzzin' 'raoun' th' State fur, do yeh? Yeh never's more mistaken in yer life. I've heerd reports circ'latin' 'raoun' thet ther'd be an election a fortni't or so from naow, 'n' thet Ansdell 'n' I was concerned in it, but yeh can't prove it by *us*. We ain't s' much as give a thought to politics sence th' Convention ended. *We've* got somethin' else to occupy aour minds with b'sides politics. I got a telegraph dispatch from him, sent from New York this mornin', thet I want to talk to yeh 'baout presently, but fust——”

"Ansdell in New York?" asked Seth, all curiosity now.

"Yes, he went on daown, while I got off at Tecumscy, 'n' I sh'd jedge from his telegraph thet he'd be'n on the go some sence he got there. But what I want to ask yeh 'baout is this: Do yeh knaow haow much money yer brother hed on him night 'fore last, when he was—when he met his death?"

The brothers looked at each other, then at the speaker, "No," answered Seth, finally. "We haven't the least idea. Why do you ask?"

"I'll come to that bimeby. Naow next, do you knaow where he was th' day b'fore th' Convention?—thet is, Monday."

"Yes, I can tell you that. He was in New York. He only got back Monday evening."

"Pre-cisely. Well, naow, do yeh knaow what he went there for?"

"No. Something connected with politics, I suppose, but I can't say for certain. He had business there very often, you know."

"Yes, I knaow. But he hed very special business this last time. Naow look at this telegram."

The two took the oblong sheet, and read:

"New York—Oct. 21. 9.42 A.M. Unexpectedly easy sailing. Found clue to money almost without looking. Fancy now must been sixteen instead ten. Hope return to-night. ANSDELL."

"Well, still I am in the dark," John said, after reading and re-reading the dispatch. "What is it all about? I suppose you understand it."

“ I'm beginnin' to see a leetle ways threw th' millstone, I think, myself,” replied Beekman. “ But it's all so uncert'n yit, I don't want to say nothin' thet I can't back up later on.”

Seth too had been busily pondering the dispatch, and he said now, with a flushing face: “ *I* know what you think! You and Ansdell have got an idea there was foul play!”

“ Well, yes, it ain't much more'n an idee, *yit* ;” assented Beekman.

“ What do you base your idea on?” demanded John, full of a nameless, growing fright lest there *might* be something further which Seth's confession had not revealed.

“ Jest you wait one day more,” said the Boss of Jay County, grimly, “ one day more 'll dew. Then I miss my guess ef we ain't in shape to tell yeh. Fust of all, there's got to be a post-mortem.”

John's impulse was to say that he and Seth had already agreed upon this, but a second thought checked his tongue.

“ 'N' it'll hev to be on th' quiet. Everything depends on thet—on keepin' it dark. There's some folks might get skeered, 'n' complicate things, ef it ain't kep' mum. 'N' thet's what I wanted to ask yeh 'baout. I've thought of Dr. Bacon, over at Thessaly, 'n' Dr. Pierce daown at the Springs. They're both good men, 'n' got level heads on 'em. What d'yeh say to them?”

“ I've no objection to them in the world, but the Coroner——”

“ Oh, I know 'bout him. He's th' blamedest fool in th' caounty. Over in Jay we wouldn't elect sech a dumb-head to be hog-reeve. But you 'n' Ansdell kin fix it with him to-morrow, 'n' I'll drive to-day 'n' see both doctors, 'n' put 'em straight. 'N' naow yeh must prommus me, both of yeh, thet yeh won't breathe a word of this to any livin' soul.”

They promised, and he climbed into his buggy, and gathered up the reins. “ Oh, there's one thing more,” he said, on reflection. “ P'raps you wonder why I'm takin' so much on myself. I'll tell yeh bimeby. I've got my reasons. I'm mixed up in it, more'n you'd think.”

He turned about, and drove off briskly toward Thessaly. The brothers stood in perplexed silence by the roadside for some minutes. There was surely enough to think about.

At last, with a frank gesture, John stretched his hand out to Seth:

“ Old boy,” he said, “ I don't know how this thing is coming out, but we'll see it through together. You go down to the office and wait for me. You might do some things to fill up the paper this week if you've got nerve enough. I'm going back to the farm.”

CHAPTER XXX.

JOHN'S DELICATE MISSION.

WHILE Seth tried to divert his thoughts at the *Banner* office by going over the freshly-arrived batch of morning dailies, and fastening his attention upon their political editorials and reports of speeches instead of their displayed and minute reports of the sensational tragedy in Tallman's ravine—John Fairchild retraced his steps toward the farm. He had a definite purpose in his mind—to confront and silence Isabel—and he strove hard as he went along to plan how this should be done, and what he should say.

He felt that his dominant emotion was wrath against this sister-in-law of his, and he said to himself as he strode along that he had never liked her. He could recall the summer a dozen years before when she came to the farm as a visiting cousin. He had been civil to her then, even companionable, for she was bright, spirited, in a word good company, but it seemed to him now that even then he had suspected the treachery ingrained in her nature—that he had been instinctively repelled by those hateful qualities, dormant in her girlhood, which were later to plot infidelity to one of his

brothers, and lure into trouble, shame, perhaps even crime, the other.

This latter phase of her work was peculiarly abominable in John's eyes. He was not going to get up any special indignation on the first count of the indictment; a bachelor of nearly forty who marries a sentimental young girl does it at his own risk, John felt, and Albert had invited just this sort of thing by exiling her to a farm, and forcing her romantic mind to feed on itself. But that she should have selected Seth—her own husband's brother, the Benjamin of the flock, a veritable child in such matters—to practise her arts upon, was grievously unpardonable. To be sure, Seth ought to have had more sense. But then John, habitually thinking of him as "the youngster," thought he could see how he had been led on, step by step, never realizing the vicious tendency of it all, until he had all at once found himself on the brink of a swift descent. Then, to do the boy justice, he seemed to have stopped short, turned his back upon the siren, and for the sake of further security, irrevocably committed himself to Annie. He had been sadly weak in the earlier stages of the affair, no doubt; but this last course appeared manly and sensible—and wholly incompatible, too, with any idea of malice or crime on Seth's part. What fault there was belonged to the woman, and she should be told so, too, straight and sharp.

Thus John's thoughts ran as he entered the house, and bade the Lawton girl tell her mistress he wished

to speak with her. He had not seen Isabel since her husband's death—she having kept her room constantly—nor for a long time previous. They had, indeed, scarcely met more than half-a-dozen times since she came to live at the homestead, and then with considerable formality on both sides. As he stood by the stove in the living-room, awaiting her coming, he knitted his brows and framed some curt, terse words of address.

She entered, clad in the same black and dark-gray wrapper which his memory associated with his mother's funeral, and which gave the effect of height and slender dignity to her figure. Her face was pale and pathetic in expression, and the ghost of a smile which flitted in greeting over it for a second accentuated its stamp of suffering. She offered him her hand, and said, in a low mournful voice:

“It was good of you to come to me, John. I have been expecting, hoping you would. Won't you take off your coat and sit down?”

He had shaken hands with her, loosened his overcoat and taken a seat before he had time to reflect that he ought to have ignored her greeting and her proffered hand. The sharp words, too, that he had arranged in his mind seemed too brusque now to utter to a weak, lone woman who was so evidently suffering.

“Yes,” he said, “I thought I ought to talk things over with you. You've got nobody else.”

“No—not a soul! I couldn't be more wholly alone if I were at the North Pole, it has seemed to

me this last day. I have eaten nothing; I haven't slept an hour. So you must make allowances for me," she said, with a weak shadow of a smile, "if I seem nervous or incoherent. My mind goes all astray, sometimes now, and I seem unequal to the task of controlling it."

He had thought at last of a question which might introduce the desired subject without wounding her feelings. "Do you happen to know," he asked, gently, "whether Albert brought a large sum of money with him from New York Monday?"

"I haven't the least idea, I am sure. In fact, I only saw him for a moment after his return. And besides, you know, he never told me a syllable about his business arrangements. No one could be in more complete ignorance of his affairs than I have always been." There was the tone of resigned regret in her voice which a wife might rightly use. "I do indeed—there is one exception—know about his will. He told me that, not by way of confidence, but because it came out—in some words we once had about property of mine in New York. I might as well tell you. The will gives everything except my third to you and your aunt and—your brother. *He* has the lion's share. Don't think I am complaining, John. I wouldn't have had it altered if I could. I am more than independent, you know, apart from right of dower. If I had had the making of the will, it would have been just the same. It is only right that his money should go to his family."

John reflected for some moments before he answered. "I am almost sorry you told me," he said then. "It makes me wretched and ashamed to think of the injustice I have done him in my mind. It sounds brutal, in the light of what you have told me,—but I am going to confess it to you—I suspected all along that he intended to come some game over us about the farm; and now, instead——. Oh, it's *too* bad. I wish he could hear me!" John continued, with a glance toward the folding doors of the parlor, once more the chamber of death. "I wish he could know how I despise myself for having wronged him in my mind."

Isabel said nothing, but her responsive eyes seemed to express appreciation and sympathy. John lost all sense of wrath toward her as he went on:

"Yes, from the very start we wronged him. We didn't understand him. He was different from us. He was a man of the world, and we were countrymen, and we thought all the while that he held himself outside the family. I never gave him credit for good motives when he came to the farm; neither did Seth. We both thought he was playing his own game, for himself, and nobody else. And here, by George! he turns out to have had more brotherly feeling, more family feeling, than we ever had. It makes me miserable to think of it. It'll break Seth's heart, too; he'll always torture himself with the thought that the last time he ever saw Albert alive they parted in anger."

The words were out before he realized their significance. He stopped short, and felt himself changing color as he looked at her to see whether she too was thinking about that terrible night.

She made a motion as if to rise from her chair; then dropped back again and returned his inquiring glance with a fixed, intent look.

"So you know something about *that*," she said. "Did Seth tell you?"

"Yes!" he answered, falteringly. "Seth told me. We had a long talk this forenoon. I think he told me about everything there was to tell. In fact, that is mostly why I've come back now to see you."

She was silent, but her eyes seemed to John to be saying disagreeable things.

He began again to realize that it was his duty to be indignant in attitude and peremptory in tone, but he was also conscious of feeling very sorry for Isabel. The village editor often described himself, and was uniformly characterized by others, as being "no hand for women." His own brief career as a married man—it seemed almost a dream now, and a very painful dream, with a short period of great happiness, then a slightly longer season of illness, poverty, debt, despair, and then the rayless gloom of death in his scarcely established home—had taught him next to nothing of the sex, and inclined him against learning more. The impressions of woman-kind which clustered about the memories of his girl-wife were, however, all in the direction of gentleness and softness. As he reflected, it grew in-

creasingly difficult for him to put on a harsh demeanor toward his sister-in-law. She might deserve it well enough, but it was not in his heart to speak ugly words to a pretty and troubled woman at such a time. He stumbled on:

"Yes, the youngster is fearfully cut up about the whole thing, and he *had* to talk to somebody. He's always been used to telling me everything. He is not a tattler, though, and I'm bound to say he only told me because I questioned him, and insisted on his making a clean breast of it. Then I sent him down to the office, and I came back here, thinking it might be best for all concerned to have a frank talk with you about it."

She had a course mapped out now in her mind. "I am sure that your motives are good, John," she said, "and that you will be fair and candid. I confess I don't see what there is to be gained, specially, but you no doubt know best. What is it you wanted to talk over?"

"Well, it isn't easy to state it, off hand. Perhaps I might as well begin by speaking of motives, as you did. I own that when I came in I wasn't so sure that your motives were good, as you say you are about mine."

"That is candid, at all events."

"I want to be perfectly open and above-board with you, Isabel. You seem to have got into your head yesterday—I won't say you have it now—some horrible and ridiculously wild suspicion of Seth——"

"I know what you mean," she interposed, with

nervous haste. "You mustn't think of that at all! You mustn't blame me for it! I was simply distracted—mad—out of my senses. I don't know *what* awful thing my fancy didn't conjure up. Don't pay any attention to that!"

"But the mischief of it is that you seem to have spoken of this to—to somebody else. It would have been unimportant otherwise. *This* complicates it badly. Don't you see it does?"

She made no answer, and kept her eyes on the figures in the carpet.

"Don't you see it does?" he repeated.

"How do you know that I spoke of it to anybody?" she asked, after a pause, and still with downcast eyes.

"That has nothing to do with it, Isabel. It's true, isn't it, that you did speak of it?"

To his surprise and embarrassment she began weeping, and hid her face in her handkerchief. He sat mutely watching her, wishing that she would stop, and perplexed at encountering on the very threshold of his inquiries and argument this unmeetable demonstration of a woman's resources.

She presently sobbed out, from behind the perfumed cambric: "You *can't* hold me accountable for what I did yesterday, or what I said! I was beside myself! I scarcely know what I thought, or what I said! I acted like a crazy woman—and felt like one, too! It is easy enough for you to be cool and collected about the thing. You are a *man*!"

"Yes, I know, Isabel," he said, kindly, "I under-

stand all that, and I can make all the allowances in the world for you, in your position. But still that doesn't alter the fact that the thing has been said, and the harm done. To be sure, I suppose, the harm will be only temporary, but as it stands it affects the prospects of more than one person—of two persons, in fact, near to us—very materially. You know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, what can be done to remedy it? That is the question. I am not going to blame you, but still the fault *was* yours, and the steps to set it right ought to be yours, too, oughtn't they?"

"What do you mean?" She looked up now, forgetting her tears.

"I am not quite sure what I do mean. I haven't thought over details. There is simply a given situation, with the question how to get out of it, and the onus of action on you. I want you to help me think what the best way will be."

"How logically you state it! Suppose I disavowed the whole thing, ignored it, refused to do anything or say anything. What then?"

"I won't consider that at all. You couldn't be so unfair as that—so ungenerous."

"Unfair! Ungenerous!" Isabel rose to her full height, and frowned down at her brother-in-law, without a trace of tears in her eyes. "Fine fairness, distinguished generosity, have been shown to *me*, haven't they! There has been so much delicacy in regarding *my* feelings! I ought to leap at the

opportunity of smoothing over matters between Mr. Seth and his lady-love. My husband's awful death, my position here, alone in the world, the shock and suffering of it all—these are mere trifles compared with the importance of seeing that their love affairs are uninterrupted! Perhaps I might get a chance at the funeral to have them kiss and make up—or would you prefer me to leave my dead now and go——”

“*Your* dead!”

The brother had risen also, and taken his hat. The exclamation carried in its tone all the bitterness with which his mind had stored itself on his walk back to the farm. Pity for the woman, perhaps something too of innate susceptibility to beauty and grace, had restrained and covered up this bitterness, so that he had supposed it gone. It flamed forth now, in wrathful satire.

As she put her handkerchief up again to her eyes, as a token of more tears, he went on, in a cold kind of excitement:

“You talk very cleverly—more so than any other woman I ever knew. But you should pick your strong phrases with more discrimination. For instance, when you want to produce a really striking effect upon me, it is unwise to use an expression which recalls to me at once things that you would rather I didn't think about. I wouldn't say '*my* dead' if I were you, especially when you are talking to his brother. It may do for outsiders, but here in the family it is a bad waste of words.”

Her only answer was a gust of sobs. They failed to move him and he went on :

“I don't know that I have any means of forcing you to do anything, or say anything, against your will. If you take that position, perhaps it won't be necessary. The wicked, ridiculous thing you thought, or pretended to think, and said to that poor girl, can be straightened out very easily. We can't prevent the pain it has already caused, but we can stop its causing more. But if you lisp it to another human being—well, I don't know what to threaten you with. It isn't easy to guess what considerations will weigh with a woman who has your ideas of wifely duty, and of her responsibilities towards young and foolish members of her husband's family, and——”

“How *can* you be so cruel, so mean, John? What right have you to talk to me like that? Everybody attacks me like an enemy. You never have been decent to me since I was married. Your whole family has treated me like an outsider, almost a criminal, since I came here. Your old cat of an aunt never looked at me except to wish me evil. Your brother—yes, if he could hear me now, from where he lies, I would say it!—never was fond of me, never tried to make a companion of me, never treated me as a wife should be treated, or even as his intellectual equal. *You* avoided me as if I were poison. The neighborhood disliked me, gossiped about me, and I hated them. Only one there was of you all who was pleasant with me, and good to

me—and now that you have turned him against me, too, you come and insult me because I was pleased and grateful for his friendship. That is *manly*, isn't it?"

John had listened to the beginning of this impassioned speech with a callous heart. But he was a just man, and he had in almost unmeted degree that habit of mind which welcomes statements of both sides of a controversy. He might have been a wealthier man, and the owner of a more thriving paper, if he had had more of the partisan spirit. But to be strictly fair was the rule of his being. He would not criticise political opponents for doing things which in his heart he approved, and, on the same principle he would not condemn unheard even this woman, if she had any justification. As she went on, he began to feel that there was considerable force in her argument. She certainly had been most disagreeably situated, connubially and socially, and her definition of the Seth episode was plausible, if that were all there was of it. He softened perceptibly in tone as he answered:

"No, I am sorry if you think I wanted to insult you. Perhaps I did speak too strongly. I apologize for it. But I feel very earnestly on this subject. I've always been a sort of father and big brother combined to Seth, and the idea of his getting into a mess, or doing foolish or discreditable things, cuts me to the quick. You can see my position in the matter. I am anxious not to hurt your feelings, but my first duty is to him. Perhaps the two need

not come into conflict. After all, no real harm has been done, I fancy, except in this one case of repeating your hysterical suspicion of him. *That* was inexcusable; can't you *see* that it was? I'm sure that if you'll think it over calmly, you'll be disposed to do what is fair and right. I'm not blaming you particularly for the other thing. You might have remembered that you were older than Seth, to be sure, but then I realize that you were not at all pleasantly placed——”

“Never mind what you realize! We won't discuss that at all. There is nothing to discuss. You and your aunt seem bound to make yourselves ridiculous about me. I won't demean myself by answering—or no! I *will* say this much to you. There has never a word passed between Seth and me that every soul of you might not have heard, and welcome. He was simply pleasant and friendly to me—and I was grateful to him and fond of him, as I might be of a brother. Where was the harm? In no decent state of society would any one ever have dreamed of suspecting wrong. But *here*—why, people live and breathe suspicion! It is the breath of their nostrils.”

“I thought you used to correspond,” John said, tentatively.

“Correspond! There it is again! What of it, I should like to know? Why shouldn't my cousin, my brother, write to me? I have all the letters;—you may see them every one. They gave me a great deal of pleasure. They represented my sole point

of contact with civilization, with fine feelings and pretty thoughts. But you can go over them all, if you like. You won't find a single whisper of proof of your aunt's mean suspicion. I am almost ashamed of myself for having stooped to defend myself—but it is just as well to let you know the truth."

"Yes!" John breathed a sigh which was not altogether of relief, but carried a fair admixture of bewilderment. This ingenious explanation did not at all points tally with the inferences drawn from Seth's confession. Perhaps it was true enough in the letter, but he felt that as a revelation of the spirit it left much to be desired. He added:

"Well, I am sorry if I misjudged you. Probably I did. However, even if Seth had come near getting into a scrape, he's safe out of it now."

This complaisant conclusion nettled the woman. She went on, as if her explanation had not been interrupted:

"Of course, we had what you might call a community of grievance to talk about, and draw us together. It wouldn't be fitting in me to say more now than that my life here was not congenial: you won't mind my saying *that* much? I had dreamed of a very different kind of married existence. Seth, too, had his trouble. In his boyhood, when it seemed assured that he was to remain the farmer of the family, his mother had planned a marriage for him. It isn't for me to say a word against Annie. She is a good enough girl in her way. But when Seth got out of his chrysalis, and learned what there

really was in him, the thought that he was committed in a sense to marrying a farm girl made him very gloomy. He used to talk with me about it, not saying anything against Annie, mind you, but——”

“That'll do!” said John, curtly. “We won't go into that. Evidently there was no limit to Seth's asininity. Let that pass. Whatever he said, or didn't say, during his vealy period, he's going to marry Annie now. There never was a time, and I fear there never will be one, when I would not call her his superior. The question is: Are you going to retract before her the false, cruel things you have said?”

“I am going upstairs again,” she said. “I think I will lie down awhile,” and moved towards the stair-door.

The brother looked at her, amazed, pained, indignant. She had her hand on the latch by the time his emotions found words:

“I've wasted my time in pitying you. God forbid that any of our family, young or old, should ever fall in with such a woman as you are again!”

He pulled on his hat and left the house.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MILTON'S ASPIRATIONS.

THE lamps were lighted in the little partitioned-off square which served as the editorial room of the *Banner* when John returned. He found Seth weakly striving to write something for the editorial page, and in substance laid the situation before him. He was not feeling very amiably toward his young brother at the moment, and he spoke with cold distinctness. The tone was lost upon Seth, who said wearily :

“I don't see that it makes much difference—her refusing. What good would it have done, if she *had* gone to Annie? She could only tell her that she had abandoned such and such ideas. That isn't what counts. The fact of importance is that she ever entertained them, that they ever existed. To my notion, there's nothing to do but to wait and see what comes of Beekman's suspicions. What do you think of them, anyway? I have been trying to imagine what he is aiming at, but it puzzles me? What do you think?”

“To tell the truth, I haven't been thinking of that. My mind has been occupied with the female aspects of the thing. I'm not impatient. Evidently

Beekman and Ansdell think they have got hold of something. They are not the men to go off on a wild-goose chase. Very good: I can wait until they are ready to explain. But what I can't wait for—or bear to think about—is poor Annie, suffering as she must be suffering to have written that letter.”

“Yes, I've thought of that, too, but I'm helpless. I can't think of anything: I can't do anything.”

“You don't seem to be of much use, for a fact,” mused the brother. “I'll tell you what I'll do, if you think best. To-morrow afternoon, after I've seen Ansdell, or before that if he doesn't come, I will go over and see Annie myself. I can go over to the school-house by the back road, and walk home with her. Perhaps by that time, too, I shall have something tangible to explain to her. Until then, I suppose she must continue in suspense. It is the penance she ought to do, I dare say—” the brother added this in mildly sarcastic rebuke—“for the luxury of being in love with such a transcendent genius as you are.”

Something like an hour before this, Annie had dismissed her classes and locked up the school-house for the night. As she did so, she mentally wondered if she should ever have the strength to walk home.

The day had been one long-drawn out torture from its first waking moments—indeed there seemed to have been nothing but anguish since her in-

terview with Isabel the previous day, not even the oblivion of sleep. Her impulse, and her grandmother's advice, had been to remain at home; but she had already left the school unopened on the fatal Tuesday, in the shock of the news of Albert's death: to absent herself a second day might prejudice the trustees against her. Besides, the occupation might serve to divert her thoughts.

Perhaps the trustees were satisfied, she said to herself now, locking the door, but there certainly had been no relief in the day's labor. The little children had been unwontedly stupid and trying; the older boys, some of them almost of her own age, had never before seemed so unruly and loutishly impertinent. Even these experiences alone would have availed to discourage her; as it was they added the stinging of insects to her great heartache. With some organizations, the lesser pain nullifies the other. She seemed to have a capacity for suffering, now, which took in, and made the most of, every element of agony, great and small. She turned from the rusty, squat little old building and began her journey homeward, with hanging head and a deadly sense of weakness, physical and spiritual, crushing her whole being.

Milton Squires had been watching for her appearance for some time, from a sheltering ridge of berry-bushes and wall beyond the school, and he hurried now to overtake her, clumsily professing surprise at the meeting.

"I jes happened up this way," he said, "Dunnao

when I be'n up here on this road b'fore. Never dreamt o' seein' yeou."

She made answer of some sort, as unintelligible and meaningless to herself as to him. She did not know whether it was a relief or otherwise that he was evidently going to walk home with her. Perhaps, if she let him do all the talking, the companionship would help her to get over the ordeal of the return less miserably. But she could not, and she would not, talk.

"I kind o' thought mebbe you'd shet up schewl fer a week 'r sao," he proceeded, ingratiatingly, "but then agin I said to m'self 'no siree, she ain't thet kind of a gal. Ef she's got any work to dew, she jes' does it, rain 'r shine'. Thet's what I said. Pooty bad business, wa'n't it, this death of yer cousin?"

"Dreadful!" she murmured, wishing he would talk of something else.

"Yes, sir, it's about's bad's they make 'em. Some queer things 'baout it tew. I s'pose yeh ain't heerd no gossip 'baout it, hev yeh?"

"No," she whispered with a sinking heart; a real effort was needed to speak the other words: "What gossip? Is there gossip?"

"Dunnao's yeh kin call it real gossip. P'raps no-buddy else won't 'spicion nothin'. But to me they's some things 'baout it thet looks darned cur'ous. Of caourse, it ain't none o' my business to blab 'baout the thing."

"No, of course."

These little words, spoken falteringly, confirmed all that Milton had wished to learn the truth about. Over night a stupendous scheme had budded, unfolded, blossomed in his mind. Originally his primitive intellect had gone no further than the simple idea of committing homicide under circumstances which would inevitably point to an accident. The plan was clever in its very nakedness. But through some row among the women, probably out of jealousy, the hint of murder had been raised, and coupled with Seth's name. If this hint ripened into a suspicion and an inquiry, a new situation would be created, but Milton could not see any peril in it for him, for Seth would obviously be involved. But it would be better if no questions of murder were raised at all, and matters were allowed to stand. This would not only place Milton's security beyond peradventure, but it would give him a tremendous grip upon Annie. It was in this direction that his mind had been working steadily since he heard of Annie's suspicions. The opportunity seemed to have come for placing the cap-stone of acquisition upon the edifice of desire he had so long and patiently been rearing.

As for the poor girl, she had reasoned herself out of the suspicion of Seth's guilt a thousand times, only to find herself hopelessly relapsing into the quagmire. Milton's hints came with cruel force to drag her back now, this time lower than ever. Even he seemed to know of it, but he proposed to maintain silence. Of course, he *must* be

induced to keep silent. Oh! the agony of her thoughts!

“You’n’ Seth was allus kine o’ frenly,” he proceeded. “Way back f’im th’ time yeh was boys ’n’ gals.”

“Yes, we always were.”

“’N’ they used to say, daown to th’ corners, that yeou two was baoun’ to make a match of it.”

“There wasn’t anything in that at all!” She spoke decisively, almost peremptorily.

“Oh, they wa’n’t, ay?” There was evident jubilation in his tone. “Never was nothin’ in that talk, ay?”

“No, nothing.”

The pair walked along on the side of the descending road silently for some moments. A farmer passed them, hauling a load of pumpkins up the hill, and exchanged a nod of salutation with Milton. This farmer remarked at his supper-table an hour later, to his wife: “I’d bet a yoke o’ oxen thet Milton Squires is a’makin’ up to the schewl-teacher. I seed ’em walkin’ together daown th’ hill to-night, ’n’ he was a lookin’ at her like a bear at a sap-trough. It fairly made me grit my teeth to see him, with his broadcloth cloze, ’n’ his watch-chain, ’n’ his ongainly ways.” To which his helpmeet acidulously responded: “Well, I dunnao’s she c’d dew much better. She’s gittin’ pooty well along, ’n’ fer all his ongainly ways, I don’t see but what he comes on, ’baout’s well’s some o’ them thet runs him daown. A gal can’t jedge much by a man’s ways haow he’ll

turn aout afterwards. *I* thought *I'd* got a prize." Whereupon the honest yeoman chose silence as the better part.

The red sun was hanging in a purplish haze over the edge of the hill as the two descended, and the leaves from Farmer Perkins's maples rustled softly under their feet. Milton drew near his subject :

"I've be'n gittin' on in th' world sence yeou fust knew me, hain't I?"

"Yes, everybody says so."

"'N' yit everybody don't knaow half of it. I ain't no han' to tell all I knaow. Ef some folks c'd guess th' speckle-ations I be'n in, 'n' th' cash I've got aout in mor'giges 'n' sao on, it'd make 'em open their eyes. It's th' still saow that gits th' swill, as my mother use' to say, 'n' I've be'n still enough abaout it, I guess."

His coarse chuckle jarred on the girl's nerves, but the importance of placating him was uppermost in her mind, and she answered, as pleasantly as she could :

"I'm sure I'm glad, Milton. You have worked hard all your life, and you deserve it."

"Yeh *air* glad, reely naow?"

"Why yes! Why shouldn't I be? It always pleases me to hear of people's prosperity."

"But me purtic'ly?" he persisted, earnestly.

"Oh, yes," she replied, absent-mindedly. Then the odd nature of the question occurred to her, but she was too distrait to think consecutively, and she added no comment to her answer.

"Well, it eases me to hear yeh say that," he went on, with awkward deliberation, "fer they's somethin' I've be'n wantin' to say to yeh fer a long time. I don't s'pouse you reelize haow well off I am?"

She did not answer. Her mind seemed to refuse to act, and she heard only the sound of his words. He took her reply for granted and continued:

"I c'd eena'most buy up that farm there"—pointing over to the Fairchild acres on the slope, now within sight—" 'n' I ain't so all-fired sure yit that I won't, nuther! But what's th' good o' money, onless yeh kin git what yeh want with it, ay?"

The impulse of her soul-weariness was to let this aimless question pass like the other, without reply. But she was reminded of the importance of being pleasant to this tedious man, and so answered, entirely at random:

"What is it you want, Milton?"

"I dunnao—I'm kind o' feared o' puttin' my foot in it; yeh won't be mad ef I tell yeh?"

"Why no, of course not. What is it?"

"Well, then," he blurted out, "I want *yeou!*"

The girl looked dumbly at him, at first not realizing at all the meaning of his words, then held as in a vise between the disposition to reply to him as he deserved and the danger, the terrible danger, of angering him. There fluttered through her senses, too, a mad kind of yearning to shriek with laughter—born of the hysterical state of her long-oppressed nerves. She eventually neither rebuked nor laughed, but said vacuously:

“Want *me*?”

“Ef yeou’ll marry me, I’ll make one o’ th’ fust ladies o’ Dearb’rn Caounty aout o’ yeh. Yeh need never lay yer finger to a stitch o’ work agin, no more’n Is’bel did, daown yander.” He spoke eagerly, with more emotion in his strident voice than she had ever heard there before.

The difficulty of her position crushed her courage. Of course she must say no, but how do it without affronting him? The idea of reasoning him gently out of the preposterous wish came to her.

“This is some flying notion in your head, Milton,” she said, civilly. “You will have forgotten it by next week.”

“Forgott’n it, ay! Yeh think sao? What’f I told yeh I hain’t thought o’ nothin’ else fur nigh onto ten year?”

His tone was too earnest and excited to render further trifling safe. He pulled out of an inner pocket and held up before her a little, irregularly squared tin-type—which she recognized as having been made in whimsical burlesque of her lineaments by an itinerant photographer years before.

“How did you come by that?” she asked, to gain time.

“I got it fr’m th’ man thet made it, ’n’ I paid a dollar bill fer it, tew,” he answered triumphantly, “’n’ I’ve kep it by me ever sence!”

After a pause she said, as calmly as she could: “I never dreamed that such a thought had entered your head. Of course, it—it can’t be.”

“Why not, I’d like to know?” he demanded. “Don’t yeh b’lieve what I’ve told yeh ’baout my bein’ well off?”

“That hasn’t anything to do with it. There are other reasons—a good many other reasons.”

“What air they?” His tone was peremptory.

“I don’t know that I can explain them to you. But truly there are so many of them—and your words took me so wholly by surprise, that—that——”

“Yeh needn’t mince matters! I *know*! Yeh hev sot yer idees on Seth! Yeh needn’t tell me yeh hain’t!”

“I won’t talk with you at all if you shout at me in that way, and contradict me flat when I assure you to the contrary.”

Milton paused for a moment, to consider the situation. They were approaching the poplars now, along the lonely turnpike, and the conversation could not be much protracted. What he had to say must be said without delay. But what was it that he wished to say? A dozen inchoate plans rose amorphously to the surface of his mind—to cajole her, to strive further to impress her with his wealth, to entreat her, to attempt to bully her. This last resource ran best with his mood, but there were difficulties. Annie was the reverse of a cowardly girl; there was nothing timid or tremulous about her; if he attempted to intimidate her, the enterprise would most probably be a ridiculous failure, for he stood too much in awe of her self-reliance and intelligence to have confidence in his own mastery.

But stay—she was fearful about Seth. Whether it was true or not that she had no idea of marrying her cousin, she was evidently solicitous for his safety. An idea born of this conclusion swiftly engrafted itself upon the hired man's general strategy. He lifted his light, shifty eyes from the grass of the roadside path to her face, once more, and said :

“Well, ef you're a mine to be mean, I kin be mean tew—meaner 'n' pussly. Ef yeh think I'm goin' to stan' still, 'n' let yeou 'n' Seth hev it all yer aown way, yer mistaken. I've only got to open my maouth to th' Cor'ner, 'n' whair'd *he* be, 'n' yeou tew?”

There was a certain indefinable suggestion of bravado in his tone which caught Annie's attention. It was the barest, most meagre of shadows, but she grasped at the chance of substance behind it.

“I don't believe you could say anything, or do anything, which would injure him,” she said, with more confidence in her words than she felt in her heart.

“Oh, yeh daon't, ay!” he growled. “Ef yeh knaowed what I knaow, p'raps yeh'd change yer teune.”

“What do you know, then? Come now, let us hear it!” She grew defiant, with an instinctive sense that the inferior being beside her was ready to retreat, if only she could keep up her boldness of front.

“Never yeou mind what I knaow!” he answered, evasively. “It'll be enough, I guess, to cook *his* geuse, when th' time comes.”

"Ah, I thought so!" she exclaimed. "You were simply talking to hear yourself talk—to scare me. Well, you see now that you wasted your breath."

"Oh, *did* I! Well, I won't waste any more of it, then, till I talk to th' Cor'ner. I kin tell him some things 'baout who rid th' black mare aout thet night, after Albert'd gone. Guess thet'll kind 'o' fix things!"

His slow imagination, working clumsily in the mazes of falsehood, had carried Milton a step too far; his simple plan of substituting Seth for himself in the events of the fatal night miscarried in a way he could not suspect.

Annie did not answer. An exclamation had risen to her lips, but something akin to presence of mind checked it there. Her brain seemed to be working with lightning flashes. The black mare had played a part in the tragedy, then; Seth had certainly not had the animal out that evening; the rushing, almost noiseless apparition which had startled them in the moonlight must have been the mare; it was coming from the direction of Tallman's; it had a rider; who could that rider have been? and how did Milton know about it?—so the swift thoughts ran, in a chain which seemed luminous in the relief it brought to her. These two questions she could not answer—in her joy at the apparent exculpation of Seth it did not seem specially important that they should be answered—and she had self-possession enough to ask nothing about them.

It was a nice question what she should say to her

companion, who was now, without any distinct suspicions on her part, growing luridly loathsome and repugnant in her eyes. The fear of angering him had died away, but a vague sense that mischief might be done by arousing his curiosity or apprehensions had come to take its place. She spoke cautiously:

“I hope you won’t do anything rash, that you would regret afterwards.”

“They ain’t nao need o’my doin’ nothin’, ef yeou’d only hev some sense. But if yeou’re goin’ to be agin me, ther’s nao tellin’ what I won’t dew,” he answered with sullen terseness.

They had come to the poplars, and Annie stopped at the stile under the thorns.

“I shall have to leave you here,” she said.

“Then yeh won’t hev me, ay? Yeh better think twice ’fore yeh say nao! Yeh won’t git another sich a chance—to live like a lady, ’n’ hev ev’rything yeh want. ’N’ ef yeh dew say nao, yeh kin rest ’sured yeh ain’t heerd th’ last of it, ner him nuther.” Milton’s little green-gray eyes watched her face intently, and he fingered his flaring plated watch-chain with nervous preoccupation. “What d’yeh say, yes’r nao?”

“I can’t say anything more than I have said—*now*,” she answered, and, stepping over the stile, left him.

For a long time afterward Annie’s conscience debated the justification of that final word, the last one she ever addressed to Milton, and which was

obviously intended to keep alive a hope that she knew to be absurdly without ground or reason. Sometimes even now she has momentary doubts about it—but she silences cavil by whispering to herself in unanswerable defence: “I thought then that possibly it might be needed to help Seth—perhaps even to save him.”

She had little leisure just then, however, to devote to moral introspection, for Samantha met her, half-way down the thorn-walk, to excitedly tell her that her grandmother, Mrs. Warren, was very much worse than usual.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“A WICKED WOMAN!”

WHEN Isabel looked into her mirror next morning, the image shown back fairly startled her. Day by day during this eventful week the glass had helped her to grow familiar with reddened eyes, with harsh, ageing lines, and with a pallor which no devices of the toilet could efface. It was not so much an added accentuation of these which riveted her gaze, now, upon the mirror, as the suggestion of a new face—of a stranger’s countenance, reflecting meanings and thoughts of the uncommon kind.

She studied the face at first with an almost impersonal interest; then as the brain associated these lineaments with her own, and made their expression a part of her own spiritual state, she said to this other self in the glass, audibly :

“Another week of this will make you an old woman.” She added, after a pause of fascinated yet critical scrutiny: “Yes, and a wicked woman, too!”

There has been what one can only hope is an intelligible reluctance, from the beginning of this recital, to essay analysis or portrayal of Isabel’s thoughts and motives. A complex, contradictory character like hers, striving now to assimilate, now to sway the simple, straightforward, one-stringed

natures with which it is environed, may be illustrated; it is too great a task to dissect it. Yet for the once we may venture to look into this troubled mind.

A wicked woman! The phrase which she had addressed aloud to the mocking image in the glass, in mingled doubt and irony, clung to her meditations. Had she ever meant to be wicked—ever deliberately, or even consciously, chosen evil instead of good? No! There was no dubious reservation in her answer. Yet within the week—oh, the horrible week!—she had come to occupy a moral position for which hell could not hold too relentless or fierce a punishment. She had hugged to her heart thoughts which, when they are linked with acts, go to expiation on the gallows. She shuddered now at the recollection of them; she could recall that she had shuddered then, too. Yet all the same these thoughts were a part of her—belonged to her. She had not repelled them as alien, or as unwelcome. Even while in terror at their mien, she had embraced them. Was this not all wickedness?

The reply came, in sophistical self-defense, that no one act or emotion of a life could be judged by itself. The antecedent circumstances, leading up to it, must be taken into account. She had been borne along on the current of a career shaped for her by others. She was not responsible—she had never fought with her destiny—she had done nothing but seek to bring some flowers and light and color into the desolate voyage of life. Was it fair

to say that these little innocent, womanish efforts to soften a sterile existence were the cause of the shipwreck—that it was these which had brought her so suddenly, dazed and terrified, into the very breakers on the sinister rocks of crime? No, the answer came again; surely it could not be fair.

Yet she had hated her husband; she had been overjoyed, even while she was affrighted, by the news of his death—or at least there was a tremulous sensation very like joy; she had hailed as her deliverer the young man whom her wild fancy made responsible for that death—yes, had even in her frenzy kissed his hand, the hand which she then believed to have blood upon it, his brother's blood! her husband's blood! Were not these the thoughts and actions of a wicked woman? What difference was there between her and the vilest murderess confined for life in a penitentiary?

Or no! What nonsense this was! What single thing had she said or done to bring on the catastrophe? It was an accident—everybody knew that now. But even if it had not been an accident, how would she have been to blame? Was it her fault that she was pleasing in men's eyes, or that Seth had been attracted by her, and had been sympathetic to her? How could she have helped it? Was there any reason why she should have tried to help it? Was it wrong for her, exiled as she was to this miserable farm life, to make a friend of her cousin—her husband's brother? And if they had grown to be attached to each other, could it be wondered at?

And it had all been so innocent, too! What single compromising word, even, had ever been spoken! Might not the most blameless of women have had just such a pretty little romantic friendship, without dream of harm?

As for the frantic things she had thought and said on that awful forenoon after the discovery, she strove to put them away from her memory, as born of a hysterical, wholly irresponsible state.

But they would come back, no matter how often banished.

Then, too—perhaps worst of all, for honest John seemed to lay particular stress upon it—was the terrible declaration she had made to Annie. About this there could be no self-deception. She would not pretend to herself that this had been done through any but revengeful, spiteful motives—pure cruelty, in fact. But was she to be thus coolly pushed aside, her romance shattered, her dear day-dream dissipated—and not to be justified in striking back? This conceited boy—she was able thus to think of Seth now, in his absence, and in the light of the affront she felt he had put upon her—and this country school-teacher, to come billing and cooing in the very hour of her supreme excitement—did they not deserve just what they had received? After all, her words had done no permanent harm. Doubtless by this time they had all been cleared up. And if Miss Annie *did* suffer a little, what better was she than other people, to be free all her life from heart-aches?

But then came a mental picture of Annie's calm, sweet, lightful face transfixed with speechless horror at the brutal words—and after it, close and searching, the question: "Why should I have stabbed Annie? She was always kindness itself to me. Was it not heartless to make that poor girl suffer?" And there followed in her mind, as an echo of her first exclamation to the mirror—that had gathered reverberating force from all the thoughts we have striven to trace—the haunting cry: "A wicked woman!"

Afternoon came, and the battle still went on. Bitter condemnation of her own conduct struggled with angry pleas of grievance against others, and the conflict wearied her into what threatened to be a sick headache. The idea of getting out into the open air and seeking relief in a walk, which had been dormant in her mind all day, finally took form, and led her outside the homestead for the first time since her husband's death.

Once outside, she walked aimlessly through the orchard—in preference to the high road, where she might meet neighbors—toward the little family graveyard. It was not until she had nearly reached this spot that she recalled having heard that Seth, too, came here on that terrible night. The recollection brought an added sense of all the wrongs she held to have been done her. She stood for a long time by the old board fence, with its coating of dry, mildew-like moss on the weather-beaten surfaces turned to the north, and its inhospitable hedging of

brown, half-bare briars, and looked in reverie upon the tombs within the enclosure.

Three generations of the Fairchilds lay here under the straggling mat of withered strawberry vines. She saw the low blue-slate slabs, nearly covered now by aspiring weeds and brambles, which modestly pleaded in antique letters that the original shoemaker, Roger, and his lowly spouse might not be altogether forgotten. Rising ostentatiously above these timid, ancient memorials, as if with intent to divert attention from their humility, was the marble obelisk marking the resting-place of the family's greatest man, the Hon. Seth Fairchild. The monument was not so white or so imposing now as it once had been, and the proud inscription setting forth how its subject had been "twice Senator of the State of New York," was almost illegible from the storm-stains and mould on its venerable front. There were some other stones, gray and small, tipping humbly toward the central monolith, as if mutely begging at least a little share of the Senator's greatness for his wife and sisters, and nearer were two plain modern slabs recounting the sole interesting facts of the colorless lives of Lemuel and Cicely Fairchild—that they had been alive, and now were dead.

Here still nearer her, almost at her feet, the widow saw some pegs driven in the ground, with string stretched around them to form a long rectangle. The sight brought no thrill to her. She was conscious of all its meaning, but felt herself scarcely interested. In life she had owed nothing but dislike

to the man whose last coming these signs of preparation betokened. His death had shocked her at first by its fearful suddenness; it did not especially disturb her now, save at times with a furtive elation at the accompanying thought that at last she was free. Her thoughts were with the living—and their relation to those long since dead.

If these rambling thoughts could have been summarized in words they would have run in this fashion:

“What has all your family pride brought you, all your planning and manœuvring, you dull countrymen? *I* wasn’t good enough for you, eh? Your breed must conspire against me, eh? and treat me like an interloper, an outsider, eh? You thought I was to be brought here too, did you, when my time arrived, and be snubbed and bullied into some back corner like the rest of your wives, while my husband, ‘the Congressman,’ had a big monument like this of your old humbug, the Senator? And you expected to patronize me, or cut me dead, as the living dolts here on the turnpike have done, did you? Well, you are fooled! I’ve escaped you! I shall never come here but once again—to bring you your ‘Congressman.’ You can have him and welcome. And that old cat of an aunt of his, she will come presently, too, and I wish you much joy of *her!* And perhaps you will give up your idea, then, that you amount to anything, or ever will amount to anything. The farm is going to a young man who will sell it, and who doesn’t care a cent for the whole

crowd of you, and who will live in a city, and eat with his fork, and forget that there ever were such people as you. And he will forget, too, that——”

She came to a full stop in her meditations. Yes, Seth would forget her, too. She had no illusions on this point. Perhaps this was too kindly a view of it, even—he might be compelled to remember her by sheer force of his bitterness toward her. There could be no doubt, after his cruel words on the eventful forenoon—their last meeting—that he scorned and despised her. What an idiot she had been to disclose to him her thoughts—those mad fancies and beliefs of that frantic morning! She might have known that the idea of his fighting his brother, on *her* account, was preposterous. What did he care about her? He had been nice with her, had written her pretty, graceful letters when she asked him to do so, and had sent her books to read—that was all. There was nothing else. She had been a fool to dream that there was anything else. He would sell the farm, and go back to Tecumseh, and marry Annie—yes, marry Annie! And they, too, would refer to her now and then, and comment on her wickedness, and hope that they might never have a daughter like her. That would be all.

She turned from the little enclosure of graves, without giving them another thought. The mental picture which she conjured up of the young couple, contented by a fireside of their own, perhaps with a child, tore at her heart-strings.

In the farm-yard she was met by Mr. Ansdell,

who was evidently watching for her, and who introduced himself courteously.

"The Coroner is here," he said, "with some medical gentlemen, and there are also your late husband's partner, Mr. Hubbard, who accompanied me from New York last night, and the District Attorney and some others. In a couple of hours or so we expect to be able to tell you what brought us. Meanwhile, we are anxious to spare you any possible intrusion—and also a possible scene. It is for this that I have waited outside for you. If you could prolong your walk for that length of time, going to some friend's house near by, for instance, without saying that anything unusual was transpiring here——"

"Yes, I will go," she answered. "Will two hours be long enough?"

"I hope so," he said, bowing his thanks.

She walked out through the great swing-gate to the turnpike, and idly chose the westward turning, along under the poplars. The curious incident of all these visitors at the house did not excite her attention. Her mind was too busy torturing itself with that marriage which was already spoken of as assured.

At the stile by the thorns, the idea of going to the Warren house suddenly occurred to her. It was a bold, purposeless, almost crazy thought; perhaps for those very reasons it commended itself to her mood. She felt herself impelled alike by good and malignant impulses to cross the stile; she walked

down the thorn path, scarcely knowing whether her purpose was to bless or to curse.

The door was opened by Samantha, whose scared face took on an added expression of anxiety on recognizing the visitor.

"Go into the parlor, 'n' I'll light the stove fer yeh," she whispered. "Th' old lady's very laow. Soon's she comes hum from schewl I'll send Annie in to see yeh."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SHERIFF ASSISTS.

WHILE Isabel sat over the stove in the cold, austere parlor of the Warren house, with its ancient furniture, the never failing photograph album, and those huge pink shells on the mantle-shelf without which no rural home used to be complete—waiting for she scarcely knew what—strange things were going forward in the home of the Fairchilds.

On the forenoon of this same day, Thursday, there had been a gathering in the office of the Thessaly *Banner of Liberty*. It was the publication day of the paper, but for once it went to press without enlisting even the most careless scrutiny, let alone the solicitude, of its editor-proprietor. He had more serious business on hand. Closeted with him in the little editorial room, whose limited space had rarely before been so taxed, were Beekman, Ansdell, the District Attorney, the Sheriff, and the younger of the dead man's two New York partners, a shrewd, silent, long-faced man. Seth had desired to be of the party but his brother had sent him off, to return after dinner.

These men gravely discussed some subjects with which our readers are familiar, and some now first

brought to light. John had a letter from Annie, sent by hand the previous evening, detailing the strange things Milton had said to her about the black mare. Ansdell and Mr. Hubbard, the partner, recited how they had discovered that Albert Fairchild, on the preceding Monday, sold \$16,000 worth of government bonds, and the abortive effort he made to so arrange the transfer that it would not be traced. Beekman recalled how the black mare had balked on the edge of the gulf the day after the murder—for they all thus characterized it now. Later, the Coroner came in by appointment, and in the presence of the dreaded District Attorney was meekness itself. He even heard that two physicians were to go out with the party, and make an examination, without taking offence.

After the noon-day dinner the gathering was reinforced by the two doctors and by Seth, the latter devoured by curiosity and vexed at being kept so long in the dark. Soon after, all of the party save the Sheriff made their way to the Fairchild house, driving by twos or threes, and at intervals, to avoid exciting suspicion. It was after the arrival of the last division that Ansdell met Isabel, and advised her to stay away from the house for a time.

The two surgeons and the Coroner went silently into the parlor, and closed the door behind them. In the living-room Ansdell, Hubbard, John, and the District Attorney took chairs around the stove, having given word that Milton, who was off on the

other side of the hill, arranging the sale of some apples, should be sent in to them when he arrived, which could not be very long now. In the kitchen, opening back from the living-room as this in turn did from the parlor, Seth and Beekman sat with the three women of the household.

These latter had been told that something was going on, or rather had inferred it from being forbidden to leave the room, and were agog with puzzled excitement. They had no clue, save a vague understanding that important personages were in the front portions of the house, but Alvira and Melissa stole unhappy glances toward Seth, in uneasy fear that the worst suspicions born of Samantha's recital were to be realized in fact. Aunt Sabrina, sitting with her shawl wrapped about her gaunt shoulders, and with her feet on a piece of wood in the oven, did not know of this story which gave point to the other women's anxiety, but was in misery between a deep yearning to learn what had happened, and a pessimistic conviction that it must be another addition to the Fairchilds' load of calamities.

They heard Milton drive up presently, and hail Dana with instructions to put the horse out, and a query concerning the several strange vehicles under the shed. Then he came into the kitchen, stamping his feet with the cold, and walking straight to the stove to warm his hands. It was growing dark in the low room, and he did not recognize Beekman.

Seth delivered his errand, saying that his brother John wished to see Milton, as soon as he returned,

in the living-room. The hired man gave the speaker a curious glance, and, after a moment or two of hand warming, went in to learn what was wanted.

Almost as he closed the door behind him, the Sheriff entered the kitchen from the outside, and after an interrogative glance toward Beekman, which the latter answered by a nod, drew up a chair leisurely by the stove.

“Who’d a thought it ’d a turned out so cold, ’fore the moon changed?” he asked of the company collectively. “Hev yeh got any cider abaout handy? ’N’ a daoughnut, tew, ef yeh don’t mine.”

While Melissa was in the cellar, the Sheriff, who was a Spartacus man and a stranger to both Seth and the females, asked of Beekman: “What did yeh agree on fer a sign?”

“Th’ shakin’ of th’ stove.”

Seth had been annoyed all day at the pains taken by John to keep the facts of the enterprise now in hand from him, and he displayed so much of this pique in the glance he now cast from the Sheriff to Beekman, that the latter felt impelled to speak:

“P’raps you disremember my askin’ yeh t’ other day ’baout whether yer brother had much money on him that night. Well, we’ve settled thet point. He did hev’—’n’ ’twas a considerable sum tew—’baout sixteen thaousan’ dollars.”

“No!” Seth’s exclamation was of incredulous surprise.

“Yes, sixteen thaousan’. We knaow it.”

“Oh! I remember now,” said Seth, searching his

impressions of the night. "I remember that when I said he might fail to be nominated, he slapped his breast two or three times as if he had something in the pocket. By George! I wonder——"

"Yeh needn't waste no more time wond'rin'. Thet was it! 'N' d'yeh knaow what he was goin' to dew with thet money? No, yeh daon't! He was agoin' to buy me! I wouldn't say this afore aout-siders; I dunnao's I'd say it to yeou ef your paper wa'n't so dum fond o' pitchin' into me fer a boss, 'n' a machine man ez yeh call it, 'n' thet kine o' thing. Yer brother hed th' same idee o' me thet your paper's got. He was wrong. They tell me ther air' some country caounties in th' State where money makes th' mare gao. But Jay ain't one of 'em. Yer brother wanted to git into Congress. Ther was nao chance fer him in New York City. He come up here 'n' he worked things pooty fine, I'm baoun' to say, but he slipped up on me. Bribes may dew in yer big cities, but they won't go daown in Jay. I don't b'lieve they's ez much of it done anywhere ez folks think, nuther."

"But this money, then, was——"

"Lemme go on! P'raps this d'never be'n faound aout, ef yer brother hadn't made mistake number tew in pickin' aout the wust 'n' meanest cuss in th' caounty to be his gao-between. I kin tell mean cusses when I see 'em, 'n' this feller he had was jest *the* dirtiest scalawag I ever did see. I kin stan' a scoundrel in a way ef he's bright abaout it, but this was a reg'lar, natchul born fool. Somehaow in th'

kentry, these men don't seem to hev no sense. Ef they're goin' to rob a man, or set his barns afire, or kill him, they dew it in the darnedest, clumsiest saort o' way, so they're sure to git faound aout the minute anybody looks an inch beyond his nose into th' thing. It makes a man ashamed to be a kentry-man to see th' foolish way these here blockheads git caught, ev'ry time."

The women had been listening intently to this monologue. They looked at one another now, with the light of a strange new suspicion in their eyes.

"Who is this man? Who are you talking about?" Seth asked eagerly.

At that moment the sound of a stove being shaken vigorously came from the living-room. The Sheriff rose to his feet, and strode toward the door of this room.

"I'll shaow him to yeh in th' jerk of a lamb's tail," he said.

The conversation in the living-room, after Milton entered, had been trivial for a time, then all at once very interesting. He had been disagreeably surprised at finding three men with John, but had taken a seat, his big hands hanging awkwardly over his knees, and had been reassured somewhat by the explanation that Mr. Hubbard, the dead man's partner, was anxious to hear all he could about the sad occurrence. The District Attorney he did not know by sight, and he did not recognize Ansdell, who

stood looking out of the window, softly drumming on the panes.

Milton told a lot of details, about Albert's return, about hitching up the grays for him, about how the news was received at the Convention and the like, all recited with verbose indirectness, and at great length. Once he stopped, his attention being directed to a slight sound in the parlor, and looked inquiry. John promptly explained that it was the undertaker, and the hired man went on.

At last the District Attorney, who had hitherto been silent, asked quietly :

"You went back to the stable—to your own room—after Mr. Fairchild drove away?"

"Yes, 'n' went to bed."

"Did you hear any one enter the stables afterward?"

"No, nary a soul."

"There is a black mare in the stables, used under the saddle. Was she taken out that night?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Well, there seems to be a pretty positive story that she was. She was seen on the road, in fact, late that night, coming from the ravine. The rider was not recognized, but the mare was. How do you account for that?"

"Tain't none o' my business to 'caount for it." Milton did not like the tendency of the conversation.

"No, I know that, but we are interested in finding out. I don't think you know me—I am the

District Attorney—and I shall take particular pains to find out.”

A gulf suddenly yawned before Milton's feet, and he made a prompt, bold attempt to leap it. “I didn't like to say nothin' 'baout it, bein' as it's in th' fam'ly”—he cast an uneasy glance at John here—“but Seth Fairchild rides th' mare a good deal. I did hear somebody saddlin' th' mare, but I took it fer granted it was him, 'n' sao I didn't git up. It 'd be jes like him, I said to myself, to go ridin' in th' moonshine. He's thet sort of a feller, naow ain't he, John?”

The sound of his own voice frightened Milton as he went on, and his closing appeal to the brother for corroboration carried the nervous accent of fear. John did not answer, but rose and walked over to join Ansdell at the window.

“Of caourse,” Milton began, in a lower voice, to which he sought to give a confidential tone, “I don't wan' to say nothin' agin Seth. Of caourse, he's John's brother, 'n'——”

The words were cut short by the rolling back of one of the parlor doors, and the entrance of the three doctors. The Coroner, who came last, pulled the door shut again. The older of the other two came to the District Attorney and said, with deliberate distinctness:

“We are both prepared to swear that Mr. Fairchild's death was caused by a gunshot wound in the head.”

It was then that John sprang to the stove, and shook its grate vehemently.

At sight of the Sheriff, who advanced upon him with a directness which left no ambiguity as to his purpose, Milton rose excitedly from his chair, cast a swift scared glance around the company, and then, while the handcuffs were being snapped upon his wrists, began to whimper.

“I didn’t do it! It’s a put-up job! It’s them brothers o’ his thet allus hankered after his money, ’n’ naow they got it they’re tryin’ to put the thing on me. ’N’ his wife, tew, thet stuck-up city gal, she——”

“Come naow, yeou better shut up,” said the Sheriff sententiously. “Th’ more yeh say th’ wuss it’ll be fer yeh.

Most of the men present averted their gaze during the brief period of alternate threats and cringing, of rough curses and frenzied fawning on the Sheriff, the District Attorney, and even the Coroner, which ensued; but Mr. Hubbard watched it all carefully with evident interest.

“That is a very curious type of criminal,” he said, as the Sheriff and his prisoner left the room; “very curious indeed! I never saw a murderer before who had so little nerve, and funked so absolutely when he was confronted with detection. Why, I’ve seen men, guilty as guilty could be, who would deceive even their own lawyers. But such a simpleton as that—he’s not worth his rope.”

“That is because you are a city man,” explained the District Attorney. “You don’t know the kind of murderers we raise here in the country. The

chances are that your city assassin would be tortured by remorse, if he escaped discovery, and that he committed the deed in a moment of passion. But the rural murderer (I am speaking of native Americans, now) plans the thing in cold blood, and goes at it systematically, with nerves like steel. He generally even mutilates the body, or does some other horrible thing, which it makes everybody's blood boil to think of. And so long as he isn't found out, he never dreams of remorse. He has no more moral perspective than a woodchuck. But when detection does come, it knocks him all in a heap. He blubbers, and tries to lay it on somebody else, and altogether acts like a cur—just as this fellow's doing now, for instance."

A hubbub of shrieks and sobs rose from the kitchen as he finished this sentence, and they with one accord moved toward the door.

The Sheriff, with an eye to his promise to the two men in the kitchen, had led the livid and slinking wretch out to the centre of the room, where the dim candles had now been lighted, and, forcing him to hold up his hands so that the manacles might be fully visible, said to Seth:

"Here yeh air! I said I'd shaow him to yeh! Here is the whelp thet did th' mischief. Look at him!"

There was a second of dead silence, as the several listeners took in the significance of his words, and of the spectacle.

The silence was broken by an inarticulate, inde-

scribable cry from Aunt Sabrina. Then came with startling swiftness a confusion of moving bodies, of screams, and the rattling of the handcuffs' chain, which no one could follow. When the intervention of the Sheriff and Beekman had restored quiet, it was discovered that the old lady, with an agility of which none could have supposed her capable, had snatched a potato knife from the table, and made a savage attempt to wreak the family's vengeance upon Milton. She had not succeeded in inflicting any injury, save a slight cut on one of his pinioned hands, and Seth now with some difficulty persuaded her to leave the room.

It fell to Alvira's lot to bind up the bleeding hand—for Melissa, undertaking the task, was too nervous and trembling to perform it.

A little dialogue, in hushed whispers, which only imperfectly reached even the sentinel Sheriff, ensued:

“Sao this is what yeh've come tew!”

“It's all a lie!”

“Oh, don't tell *me*! Ef you'd be'n contented with yer lot in life, 'n' hadn't tried to swell yerself up like a toad in a puddle, this wouldn't a happen'd. But nao, yeh poor fewl, yeh must set yerself up to *be* somebody! 'N' naow where air yeh?”

Words with which to answer rose to Milton's bloodless lips, but he could not give them utterance. He could not even look at her, but in a dazed way stared at the hand, which he held so that she could wind the bandage in spite of the gyves.

“I didn’t use to think yeh was aout-’n-aout bad,” she continued, more slowly; “they was a time when yeh might a made a decent man o’ yerself—ef yeh’d kep’ yer word to me.”

This time he did not make an effort to answer.

¶ The task of sustaining the talk alone was too great for her. The tears came into her eyes, and blinded the last touches to the bandage. As it was completed, the Sheriff put his hand roughly on the prisoner’s shoulder. The meaning of this movement spread over her mind, and appalled her. With a gesture of decision she stood on tiptoe, lifted her face up to Milton’s, and kissed him. Then, as he was led away, she turned to the onlookers, and said defiantly, between incipient sobs:

“I daon’t keer! Ef t’ was th’ last thing I ever done in my life, I’d dew it. We was—engaged—
4 once’t on a time!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT "M'TILDY'S" BEDSIDE AGAIN.

"Do you clip over and tell Annie," John had said to Seth, when the first excitement of the scene had passed off, and they stood at the kitchen window, watching the Sheriff's buggy fade off in the dusk down the hill toward Thessaly jail. "It's the thing for you to do—the quicker the better!"

Annie had been home from her day's task some minutes, and sat by her grandmother's bedside. The patient was in a semi-comatose state, breathing with unnatural heaviness, and Samantha had been dispatched with all haste to bring a doctor from Thessaly. It seemed terribly probable that Mrs. Warren's last day had come.

Yet as she sat by the curtained recess, holding in her's the withered hand which lay inanimate on the high edge of the bed, Annie still thought very little of the great change impending over her home; she had faced this death in life so long that its climax did not startle her, or wear the garb of strangeness. Instead, she was pondering the unaccountable, unwelcome fact with which Samantha had greeted her on her return—that Isabel was in the adjoining room, and had asked to see her.

What could it mean? What could Isabel's purpose be in coming? And ought she to sacrifice her own feelings to the dictates of politeness, and go in to see this wicked, cruel woman? Perhaps she had come to retract and apologize for the fearful words of Tuesday. Perhaps her intention was to reiterate them, or worse, to recount that now the whole world would know of them—and gloat over her pain. No, that could scarcely be, for since her interview with Milton Annie felt satisfied at least of Seth's innocence. But still something new might have been disclosed—Isabel might have evil tidings of some sort with which to overwhelm her afresh. What should she do?

The parlor door was ajar, and though she could not see her visitor, she could plainly hear the snapping of the wood fire within, which Samantha had kindled. Isabel must be perfectly aware of her return, and of her presence in this sick chamber. Every minute that she hesitated would only augment the widow's anger at being thus inhospitably neglected. Even if she had relented, and had come with kindly intent, this reception might alter her impulses.

She rose to enter the parlor, but still stood irresolute, holding her grandmother's hand, when there came the sound of footsteps in the front hall—then of a hasty knock on the door opening from the hall into this room in which she was. She opened the door, and before her, excited and jubilant, stood her cousin Seth.

"I've come to tell you!" he burst out, "It's all cleared up. There *was* a murder. Milton did it! He's just been arrested! I tried to ring your bell, but it didn't seem to work. So I *had* to come in! And now——"

He opened his arms with an unmistakable gesture, and they closed fondly upon an overjoyed maiden, who sobbed upon his breast for very relief.

When she found breath and words, it was to say:

"Oh, you can't guess what I have suffered these last two days; I thought I should never live through them! And now it seems as if I should go wild with joy—as if I couldn't keep my feet down on the floor!"

"Yes, yes, I know, my darling. But we shall be all the happier for this spell of wretchedness. Dry your eyes, pet. There shall be no more thought or talk of tears—much less of dying."

"O Seth!—I forgot!—my grandmother!"

She lowered her voice, and told him her fears.

Hand in hand, and with his arm about her shoulder, they moved softly to the bedside of the dying woman. The noise of the talking, or some less apparent influence, had aroused her from her lethargy. Her pale eyes were brilliant still, with an unearthly light, it seemed to the awed young man, and she rested their gaze fixedly upon the couple.

"Who is that?" she asked in a querulous whisper.

"It is Seth, Granny," the girl answered, relapsing unconsciously into the familiar form she had not used since childhood.

The aged woman restlessly moved her head, and her eyes snapped with impatience at her inability to raise herself from the pillow.

"I won't have him here! Tell him to take his arm away. What's he doin' here, anyway? He deserted yeh! His own father told me so! Tell him to go away! I hate the sight of the hull breed!"

"But he's come back to me, Granny," the girl pleaded, while Seth shrank backward in the shadow of the curtain. "Truly he has, and he's not to blame. And I love him very dearly"—a pressure from the young man's hand answered the sweetness of this avowal—"and he will be all I shall have left when—when—" she stopped, unwilling to conclude her thought in words.

"An' will he take yeh away, an' do by yeh ez a husban' ought to do, or will he take yeh onto that Fairchild farm, an' break yer heart out ez his father did his mother's, an' ez his uncle did yer mother's, an' ez his brother, so they tell me, is doin' with his wife?"

"Oh, mercy!" the girl exclaimed, involuntarily; then she whispered to Seth, back of the curtains: "What shall I do! I forgot all about it—Isabel is there in the parlor and she has heard every word we've said."

The quick ears of the invalid caught the whispered explanation.

"Isabel!" she said, sharply. "That's Albert Fairchild's wife ain't it?"

"Yes!" the girl answered. She tried in dumb show to convey to Seth that her grandmother was ignorant of his brother's death.

"Go an' fetch her in here," said Mrs. Warren, with more animation in her voice than it had shown before. "I want to see her—to talk with her."

"But, Granny, you ought'nt to see strangers; you know, the doctor——"

"I guess she ain't much more of a stranger than this young man you've got here. Go an' fetch her, I say! I won't hurt her, an' she won't hurt me."

There was nothing for Annie to do, but go into the parlor, and bow shamefacedly to Isabel, and say, with embarrassment in every syllable: "Excuse me for not coming before, but I think my grandmother is dying. She wants very much to see you. Won't you come, please?"

Isabel had risen to her feet upon Annie's entrance. To the latter's surprise and increased confusion she held forth her hand with a friendly gesture. "Yes, I will come with you," she said, as Annie doubtfully took the proffered hand, and the two women entered the sick-room.

Isabel did not seem to see Seth, who stood at the head of the bed, among the drawn curtains, but walked to the bedside and said softly: "I am Isabel, Mrs. Warren; I am sorry that our first meeting should find you so low."

"So you're Albert's wife, eh?" The old woman eyed her keenly, for what seemed a long time. "I've heered tell o' you. Would you mind gettin'

that candle there, on the mantle-piece, an' holdin' it, so't I kin see yer face?"

Isabel gravely complied with the request, and stood before the invalid again, with the yellow light glowing upon her throat and lower chin and nostrils and full, Madonna-like brows. Her face was at its best with this illumination from below. She would have been a rare beauty close before the footlights.

"Well," said Mrs. Warren, after a long inspection, "P'raps it'll sound ridiculous to yeh, but yeh don't look unlike what I did when I was your age. The farm ain't had time to tell on yeh yit. But it will! It made me the skeercrow that you see; it'll do the same for you. When I was a girl, I was a Thayer, the best fam'ly in Norton, Massachusetts. We held our heads high, I kin tell yeh. Why, when I brought my side-saddle here, stitched with silk, 'twas the fust one they'd ever seen in these parts. But I married beneath me, an' I come up here into York State to live, on this very farm. With us, farmin' don't mean a livin' death. P'raps we don't hev sech fine big barns ez yeh build here, but our houses are better. We don't git such good crops, but we pay more heed to education and godly livin'. It's th' diff'rence 'twixt folks who b'lieve there's somethin' else in life b'sides eatin' an' drinkin' an' makin' money, an' folks that don't. Well, I left a good home, an' I come here, an' here I am. Look at me! Look at Lemuel Fairchild's wife, Cicely—she was a relation of yours, wasn't she?—see how the farm made an ole woman o' her, an' broke her

down, an' killed her! You're young, an' you're good lookin' yit, but it'll break yeh, sure's yer born. Husban's on these farms ain't what they air in the cities, nor even in the country in New England. I'm told your husban' don't treat you right."

"Don't let us talk about that—please!" said Isabel: she stole a swift, momentary glance toward Seth as she spoke.

The keen eyes in the recess followed this look. "Well, no," the husky, whispering voice went on, "p'raps it ain't none o' my business. But tell me about this young man here—yer husband's brother. I want to know about him."

"What about him?" asked Isabel slowly, after a pause.

"Why, is he a likely man? Air his habits good? Could he take this girl o' mine—an' she's a good girl, Annie is—could he take her to Tecumsky, an' make a fit home fer her? An' *would* he do it? Would he make her a good husban'—ez good ez she desarves? I ask you, 'cause you know him. I leave it to you—would you yerself marry him ef yeh was free, an' feel safe about him? Come, now, tell me that!"

Isabel hesitated so long that the old woman, seemingly wandering a little after her long, laborious concentration of thought, broke in again:

"Oh, I know 'em! I know 'em! Of all the Fair-childses, there never was one decent one. They stole my daughter, an' let her die 'mongst strangers, an' they made a broken ole woman o' me, an' they

slaved Cicely's life out o' her, an' now they want my Annie——”

“No,” said Isabel here, speaking softly, and putting her hand on the wasted arm which lay above the coverlet. “I think you wrong Seth. Whatever the rest may have done, I think he will be a good husband to Annie. I am *sure* he will.”

No answer, save a low, incoherent murmuring, came from the recess. The invalid had lapsed into the lethargy of exhausted nature. As the trio stood by the bedside even this sound ceased. Nothing was to be heard but the labored, unnatural breathing.

Isabel placed the candle again upon the shelf. She had not removed her bonnet and wrap, and she turned now irresolutely toward the door.

Annie went to her, and silently took her hand. “I forgive you,” she whispered. “Was there anything else? Did you want to speak to me?”

“I don't know what I wanted when I came. Let me go now. Perhaps if I said any more, I should hate myself afterward.”

And thus, without a glance at Seth, she went.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“SUCH WOMEN ARE!”

THE story, such as it is, is told.

Before the daily press of the State, which had given great attention to the tragedy in Dearborn County, became fairly aware that a mystery attached to it, the wretched Milton had confessed his crime. He had followed and come up with his employer, who stopped at his call. There was a conversation—then the killing. The prisoner made a weak effort to pretend that there was a quarrel first, and that his deed was in self-defence, but he deceived no one. He had with much difficulty led the grays off the side of the ravine, the murdered man being first thrown over, and the horses and buggy purposely hurled down upon him. There was some angry criticism when it became known that the District Attorney had agreed to accept a plea of murder in the second degree, and the popular explanation—that it was done from motives of consideration for the family—provoked not a few jibes from people who wanted to know why the Fairchilds were any better than other folk. But the course of the law was not affected by this comment, nor did the District Attorney suffer appreciably from it when he came up the succeeding autumn

for re-election. The money was all recovered—and, if you have the influence requisite to obtain a visiting pass to New York's forest-girt prison on the Eastern watershed of the Adirondacks—that terrible subterranean place of woe from which even Siberian gaolers might get some hints of new things in anguish—you may still see a thin, bent, evil-faced wretch dragging out existence in the mines, who once was reckoned a likely man in Dearborn County, and who cast its united vote at the most famous of all Tyre's Conventions.

The funeral of Albert Fairchild will long be remembered in all the section round. More than one State official attended, and there was a vast concourse of lesser political lights, who kept a shrewd eye upon opportunities for profitable discourse with each other, before and after the services, while they put themselves dignifiedly in evidence before the public by getting their names in the local papers.

There were no surprises to the inner circle of the family when the will came to be read. Subject to the widow's third, the farm was devised in equal parts to the two brothers, but the major share of the other property went to Seth. The partner from New York remained at the homestead long enough to arrange the details by which the widow's portion was bought by the brothers, and her leave-taking accomplished.

John Fairchild lives in high contentment on the ancestral farm. He grows stout now, in the accustomed Fairchild fashion, and though his light

ruddy face and brown beard are hostile to the suggestion, people profess to see the family likeness in him as he grows older. Aunt Sabrina especially cherishes this fancy with fondness. She has come to regard this nephew, whom once she so deeply disliked, with some affection and vast esteem, and she devotes her hours to dreaming of the great things he may accomplish as the Fairchild of Dearborn—what time she is not joining Alvira in prayer that he may not be moved to marry a city woman. Thus far there are no indications that he thinks of marrying any one, and his ambitions seem to take no higher form than the reinvigoration of the *Banner of Liberty*, which he drives over to Thessaly three times a week to superintend, and which, they say, promises soon to blossom into a daily.

One closing scene we may glance at—a pretty room, with modern furniture, and wide, flower-clad windows looking upon one of the best of Tecumseh’s residential streets. Annie, grown brighter-faced and yet no older in looks, despite the nearly four years of married life which have gone by, stands at the window with a baby in her arms, and laughs as she tosses the infant forward toward the panes, in greeting to the paternal parent, who is coming up the front steps. The wife is in gay spirits, not only because the head of the house has come home to dinner instead of stopping at the Club, but for another reason, compared with which all dinners were trivial.

“O Seth, her first tooth has come through!”

“That so? It's about time, I should think.”

His reception of the great tidings is so calm, not to say indifferent, that the beaming wife looks at him in mock surprise. Seth has not aged specially either, but he wears this evening an unwontedly serious expression of face, and gets into his dressing-gown and slippers with an almost moody air.

Baby is brought up in frowning, blinking proximity to her sire and made by proxy to demand an explanation of this untoward gloom, on an occasion which ought to be given over to rejoicing.

“Oh, I'm tired,” Seth answers; “and then—then I have a letter which puzzles and annoys me a little.”

“Is it anything that I know about?” Annie has seated herself beside him now, and looks sweet inquiry.

“Well, yes. It is a letter from Dent—you know I've let him go down to Washington to get an idea of the place and the men while the session is on—and along with a letter to the paper, pretty good stuff, too, he sends me this personal note. Read it for yourself.”

Annie took the letter, and reads steadily along through its neat chirography:

“WASHINGTON, *March 7th.*

“DEAR FAIRCHILD:

“I send a letter going into the Silver question from the standpoint of some of the Western men I have talked with. They impress me as being more

sincere than sensible on the subject. I think the trip will be of vast service to me—and also, I trust, to the paper.

“Last evening, I met for the second time since I have been here, an elderly gentleman from your part of the State, named Beekman. Like myself, he is down here to look around, and get an idea of things. It is the first time, I should judge, that he has been so far away from home, and his comments are extremely droll—often very clever, too. He seems to know you very well, and asked me to remember him kindly to you, and express his congratulations upon your purchase of a controlling interest in the paper. He wanted me to be sure and say to you that while the experiment of electing Ansdell had worked very well—he seems to admire Ansdell greatly—you mustn’t allow that to lead you into the habit of thinking that all bolters are saints and all straight-party men devils. It seems that since he has been here he has encountered some foolish and exceptional Southern Congressman who provoked him by saying ‘*Your* Government’ and ‘*your* laws’ instead of using the pronoun ‘*our*,’ and that has made him a great Stalwart again—for the time-being.

Annie looked up from the sheet. “I must say I don’t see anything in all this to particularly disturb anybody. This seems just the harmless sort of letter I should expect your innocuous Mr. Dent to write.”

“Read the rest of it,” was Seth’s reply.

She went on:—

“By the way, I met your sister-in-law among the guests at a reception the other evening, to which Mr. Ansdell kindly secured me an invitation. Her

residence on K street—she gave me the number, which I have somewhere—is said to be one of the most charming homes in Washington. She is very popular in society here, and I am told that you meet her at every fashionable gathering. She was certainly very pleasant with me, when Mr. Ansdell presented me and explained who I was. She especially asked me if I knew what you had named your baby-girl, but I could not tell her.

“I could tell her if she asked *me!*” remarked the young wife, grimly. “The very idea!”

“Go on,” said Seth—“or I shall feel that we ought to have named her Procrastinatia instead of Annie; get to the end of the thing.”

Annie got to the end with a single sentence:

“By the way, it may interest you—and I hope you won’t be annoyed at my mentioning it, and indeed you may very possibly have heard it already—to learn that everybody here seems to understand that Mr. Ansdell is shortly to marry your sister-in-law, and he himself, speaking to me, referred to her in a way which amounted to a declaration of the fact.”

“Well, there you have it!” said Seth slowly, after a long pause in which husband and wife looked at each other. “That *is* news, isn’t it?”

“I should think so!” Annie spoke deliberately, too, turning the letter over with a meditative air. “I should think so!”

The gravity of his wife’s tone seemed to Seth to be more profound than the circumstances altogether demanded.

"I don't know after all," he said, in half-apology for his own earlier confession of gloom, "but that it would be a tolerable match. I don't say that they would be happy in the sense that we are happy, my girl; but she has a great many qualities which would make her a helpful wife to an ambitious, successful, masterful sort of public man like Ansdell. Come, now, let's be fair to her. Dent says that she is very popular in Washington."

"Yes," replied Annie thoughtfully, drawing her daughter closer to her breast, "she always will be popular with people who are not married to her. Such women are!"

THE END.

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